



McCaskill Family Services, PLLC
Pediatric Psychologist & Psycho-Educational Evaluation Specialists
Main Business Office: 409 Plymouth Rd., Suite 250, Plymouth, MI 48170
Brighton Location: 2040 Grand River Annex, Suite 300, Brighton, MI 48114
Phone: (734) 416-9098, Ext. 1 FAX: (734) 416-0158
www.mccaskillfamilyservices.com office@mccaskillfamilyservices.com

Mental Health Myths: Fact Versus Stigma

By: Sierra Sands, LLP

Disclaimer: This article is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical or mental health advice. Treatment decisions should always be made in consultation with a qualified healthcare professional.

We have heard it before: “Just think positive!” or “Everyone feels anxious sometimes, it’s not that big of a deal”, and so on. Statements like this feel invalidating and fuel mental health stigma. In turn, this can prevent people from getting the help that they need. Read on to challenge some common mental health myths and learn evidence-based truths.

Myth 1: Mental health problems are not real illness.

Truth: While different from other physical medical disorders, mental health conditions are recognized as medical diagnoses, just like other medical illnesses and conditions. However, they generally involve disturbances in thinking, emotional regulation, or behavior that causes distress and impairs the day-to-day functioning of that individual. Brain chemistry, genetics, environmental factors, and trauma all play a role in the development of mental health concerns. It is not a weakness or character flaw.

They are treatable, valid health concerns. They impact the core of one’s being and alter one’s way of thinking and perception, which is treated with a variety of psychological and social interventions, rather than simply treating dysfunctional physiological factors as you would with other medical conditions.

Myth 2: Medication changes who you are.

Truth: Medication aims to restore balance, not change your personality. These medications work by balancing brain chemicals, such as serotonin, dopamine, GABA, or norepinephrine, to regulate someone’s mood, thoughts or behavior. Not everyone needs medication. In some cases, individuals with mental health concerns can engage in psychotherapy treatment and manage their symptoms by learning coping strategies and ways to restructure their thinking without taking medication. However, some people may need a combination of medication and therapy to meet their mental wellness goals.

Treatment plans are individualized. Individual response to medications varies based on factors like genetics and metabolism. A medication or treatment that may work for someone else might not be the right fit for you. That is why doctors and mental health professionals work with each person to personalize a plan to meet their needs.

Myth 3: Therapy is only for people in crisis.

Truth: Therapy can be preventive. Proactive therapy can help individuals develop coping mechanisms, increase emotional resilience, and notice potential issues before they become severe. It supports growth, coping skills, and self-awareness. Lots of people use therapy as a way to improve day-to-day life, like a “workout” to maintain their emotional and mental health.

Many people attend therapy for life transitions or stress management. Someone may not have a diagnosable mental health concern to want to attend therapy. Other life concerns and challenges are a valid reason to want to attend therapy, such as navigating life during or after big changes, work/school stress, self-esteem concerns, or interpersonal issues.



Myth 4: Talking about suicide puts the idea in someone's head.

Truth: Research shows asking directly can reduce risk. While this can be a difficult topic to discuss, when you ask someone if they are having thoughts of killing themselves, you are more likely to save a life.

Open conversations increase safety. Making a connection with someone in a conversation shows that you care and helps them know that you may have heard their cries for help. This reduces the possibility that someone is suffering in silence. Knowing warning signs saves lives. Common warning signs include: social withdrawal, sudden change in character, threats, self-harm, increase in substance use, feeling no purpose for life or reason for living, and feeling trapped. If you notice that someone may be showing these signs, conversations about suicide can and should be had.

If you or someone you know are experiencing suicidal ideation, it is important to seek professional help. For acute concerns, call/text 988 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Mental health is health and it is important to take these concerns seriously. For many people, some of these myths can feel like facts, and it is important to reflect and work on changing internalized beliefs about oneself or others to reduce the stigma that often prevents people from accessing care. If you feel like therapy is the right step for you, whether you are wanting to work on managing a mental health condition or take preventative action, our clinicians at McCaskill Family Services can help you meet your goals.