

# BUSTING MYTHS DURING MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

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Did you know that May is National Mental Health Awareness Month? It may just be our favorite month of the year at ERC: Counselors & Consultants. There are so many myths and misconceptions around mental health and counseling that can keep people from accessing the care they need, and we want to change that, so we've busted five common mental health myths.

## **Myth One: Most people don't struggle with mental health issues.**

While many assume that mental health issues only impact a small amount of people, the reality is that everyone experiences issues that affect their mental health at some point in their life. Workplace and household stress, relationship challenges, grief from loss, life transitions, and parenting concerns are common and can impact mental health. Seventy-six percent of U.S. employees report struggling with at least one issue that affected their mental health.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, these issues can be related to diagnosable mental health disorders, such as clinical depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. To be diagnosed with a mental health disorder, there are certain criteria or symptoms that must be met. About one in five U.S. adults experience a mental illness.<sup>2</sup> You can also have symptoms of a disorder without meeting all the criteria and being formally diagnosed.

## **Myth Two: Counseling is for people with *serious* mental health issues.**

You don't need to be in crisis to benefit from talking with a therapist, and counseling isn't just a last resort option. On the contrary, reaching out before an issue is out of control can help you get back on track sooner. You don't need to have a diagnosable mental health disorder to participate in counseling either; counseling can be used to address any issues that impact emotional wellness, develop personal skills, improve emotional well-being, find greater purpose in life, and/or build your resiliency.

## **Myth Three: Counseling isn't really confidential.**

This couldn't be further from the truth. Counselors and mental health professionals are required to comply with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, also known as HIPAA. These requirements also apply to counseling services through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

## **Myth Four: Counseling is just talking about problems.**

It's true that you will probably talk about problems in counseling, but you will also work on improving issues. A skilled counselor can help you work towards achievement of your mental health goals. As an outside party, counselors can provide a more impartial view and perspectives that you may not see. With advanced degrees and continuing education in mental health, counselors are also uniquely trained to help people address mental health issues.

## **Myth Five: Counselors will judge my problems or try to tell me what to do.**

Many counselors, especially those who've practiced for a while, will tell you that there isn't too much they haven't heard. They are used to being there for people during tough, embarrassing, uncomfortable, or emotional moments in life and know that it's part of being human. A counselor's role is not to judge you, tell you what to do with your life, or solve your problems for you.