

## Let's Talk: Conversation Starters About Stigma

### Topic 1:

#### Fact

- What is stigma? Sometimes it's hard to talk about because we don't know how to explain it. Stigma is anything that stereotypes, places a pre-judgement, or label on a person, situation, or idea. Change to Chill focuses on reducing stigma around stress, anxiety, depression and other related conditions that are common with teens.

#### Conversation

- What does stigma mean to you? What does it look like? What does it feel like?
- Have you experienced stigma before?
- Have you ever applied stigma to a person, situation or idea (It's okay, we all have!)?

### Topic 2:

#### Fact

- According to NAMI, 1 in 5 people have or will receive a mental illness diagnosis in their lifetime. That sounds pretty scary, but it doesn't have to be. Part of addressing stigma is taking the scary factor out of mental health. Mental illness is just like other chronic health conditions – think of acne, diabetes, high blood pressure, Celiac disease. We don't apply the same kind of stigma to people who have these types of health conditions as we do to those living with a mental illness, even though they are all common, manageable and treatable!

#### Conversation

- How does it make you feel to learn that 1 in 5 people have or will have a mental illness at some point in their life? What are ways that you could talk about this with your friends or family?
- How does learning that mental illness is a health condition, just like any other health condition, change the way you think about mental illness?

### Topic 3:

#### Fact

- Sometimes people apply stigma to those living with a mental illness, thinking they just can't "deal" with life and stress the way everyone else can. But no one has their life completely together! Everyone has their own unique stressors and life circumstances and their own unique ways of coping with them. Learning what stresses you out is helpful to everyone and can help reduce stress and, ultimately, improve your mental health.

#### Conversation

- Identify some of the main stressors in your life. As you are comfortable, write them down and share with a friend or peer. Discuss the differences and similarities on your lists and brainstorm some healthy ways to cope.

### Topic 4:

#### Fact

- Often, there is a misconception that people who are having a hard time want to be left alone to deal with their issues by themselves. While this may sometimes be true for people living with mental illness, it is often challenging for people who are struggling to reach out for support – it's not that they want to be left alone, it might just be that they don't know how to ask for support!

#### Conversation

- Practice being a supportive listener using these tips:
  - Find a safe and comfortable place
  - Ask questions that allow the person to talk about how they are doing openly
  - Be an active listener – listen but don't interrupt
  - Respond with understanding

## Topic 5:

### Fact

- Stigma often shows up as unwelcome labels like “challenged”, “crazy”, “nuts”, “psycho” or “not normal”. Using these kinds of labels can make those living with a mental illness feel like “others” – set apart from the rest of the world. Using person first language (ex. a person living with depression) keeps the individual’s identity as separate from what they are struggling with. People are not their struggles!

### Conversation

- When you think of stigma what negative labels come to mind?
- What would be positive, uplifting words to use instead of the negative labels?
- What negative label do you use? Can you commit to no longer using this label?