

WALK IN OUR SHOES

Mental illness may not feel like the most important topic to discuss with your child; however, consider these facts:

- Research shows that **one in four American adults is living with a diagnosable mental disorder.**ⁱ
- Approximately 9 million children in the U.S. have serious emotional problems.
- Research shows that half of all mental illnesses start by age 14, and three-quarters start by age 24.
- Only 1 in 5 of these children is receiving appropriate treatment.ⁱⁱ

It's almost certain that someone in your extended family is experiencing mental health challenges, and needs your support. As a parent, your role is critically important in learning about, early identification of, and accessing support and treatment for mental illness.

There are many misperceptions about people with mental health challenges. For instance, **the vast majority of people (95 to 97%) who have been diagnosed with a mental illness are not violent or dangerous**. Despite what we sometimes see depicted in movies and in the news, people with serious mental health challenges are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. In fact, people with serious mental illness are 11 times more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general public. By educating ourselves, we can guide our children to learn that it is hurtful and unfair to judge someone because he or she has been diagnosed with a mental illness.

Why should our children know the facts about mental health? The goal of Walkinourshoes.org is to stop children from being affected by the stigma of mental illness, because **stigma hurts. It can do more damage than a mental illness itself.** Stigma related to mental illness is one of the primary barriers that keep people from seeking and receiving treatment. It also prevents parents from getting help for their kids. Fear of being hurt or isolated because of stigma impacts the whole family. Young people may be afraid to be open with their parents. Parents may be uncomfortable discussing mental health concerns with their children. As a result, loved ones who need help and support may suffer alone. This is alarming, because with support and treatment, up to 90 percent of individuals diagnosed with a mental illness have a significant reduction in symptoms and improved quality of life.

Walkinourshoes.org is part of Each Mind Matters: California's Mental Health Movement. Each Mind Matters unites the hundreds of organizations working together to create health systems that serve minds and bodies, and the millions of Californians who refuse to stay silent while untreated mental illness takes an unnecessary toll on our families and communities. Together, we are creating a California where *Each Mind Matters*.

As a parent, we encourage you to join us at Each Mind Matters in creating stigma-free environments for our children. You can [join the movement](#) and create your own unique pledge at EachMindMatters.org.

Sample pledges

- As a parent, I will create a better tomorrow for my kids by supporting those of us who are living with mental health challenges today.
- I will support other parents who may be struggling with a mental health challenge in their families.
- I will teach my children that it's unacceptable to disrespect people who are living with mental health challenges.

ⁱ Kessler RC, Chiu WT, Demler O, Walters EE. Prevalence, severity, and comorbidity of twelve-month DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R). *Archives of General Psychiatry*, June 2005.

ⁱⁱ SAMHSA, *Developing a Stigma Reduction Initiative resource kit*, 2006.