"You finally decide to get help, and then you’re punished for it – pigeonholed into a diagnosis, shamed, labeled, and discriminated against for life. The stigma can be worse than the illness."

**Stigma is about disrespect:**
- It hurts, punishes, and diminishes people.
- It harms and undermines all relationships.
- It appears in behavior, language, attitude, and tone of voice.
- It happens even when we don’t mean it.

**Disrespectful Language:**
- Crazy, lunatic, nuts, loony tune, psycho, etc.
- Manic-depressive (when referring to a person)
- Schizophrenic
- Handicapped person
- Slow, low-functioning
- Normal

**Respectful Language:**
- Mental illness or psychiatric disability
- Person with bipolar disorder/manic-depressive illness
- Person who has schizophrenia
- Person with a disability
- Person who has cognitive difficulties
- Person with no disabilities

**Some Rules of Thumb...**

1. **DON’T focus on a disability.** Focus instead on issues that affect the quality of life for everyone, e.g., accessible transportation, housing, affordable health care, etc.

2. **DON’T use generic labels such as “the retarded” or “the mentally ill,” etc.** They are unkind and depersonalize people.

3. **DO respond to people who have a mental illness as individuals.** Learn about the person and deal with them on the basis of what you know, not what you assume.

4. **DO speak in people first language.** Say, for example, “child with ADHD” rather than an "ADHD child."

5. **DO treat people with the dignity and respect they deserve.** After all, we are talking about our family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

6. **DO emphasize abilities, not limitations.** People with mental illness are some of our most creative and talented people including arts, athletics, sciences, television, movies, and the theater. They have made our lives better.