



# NoStigmas Introduction

REDEFINING MENTAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

Created by: Jacob Moore - Founder & President  
Elizabeth Riegert - Creative Director

# Introduction & Overview

Welcome! So, you want to make a difference for yourself or others affected by mental illness and suicide? Well, we've created a place for you to do just that. This course was created by people who have lived experiences with mental illness, suicide and trauma. Essentially, this course is a form of peer support that's validated by the pros!

In this first section, here's what we'll explore:

- About NoStigmas
- NoStigmas Core Values
- About the Creators
- Identification of Need
- Types of Mental Illness
- Defining Stigmas
- Ally Training Overview

## About NoStigmas

NoStigmas empowers a global mental health community through education, support & action. It's mental health our way- Created for peers, by peers!

In collaboration with mental health and wellness professionals and those with lived expertise, we're building awareness, community and working towards equality. We're a vehicle for you to share your story, explore your wellness plan, participate in meaningful events and create awareness that prevents suicide. Our support tools include the Learning Center, Resource Directory and Peer Group.

# NoStigmas [nō-stig-məs]

noun | verb | adverb | adjective

1. Absence of shame or disgrace
2. State of acceptance and equality
3. A positive shift in thinking

synonyms: affirmation, dignity, esteem, hope, knowledge, respect, support

origin: NoStigmas.org, 2011 C.E.



#RedefineNormal

## What We're Not

NoStigmas is not crisis Intervention. If you're in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, please contact local emergency services or the Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-TALK or text NOSTIGMAS to 741-741.

NoStigmas also doesn't offer counseling or other direct services. If you need assistance finding psychological or other community services, please visit our [Resource Directory](#) to check for help in your area.

## NoStigmas Core Values

This is a network of compassionate, educated and inspired individuals that share the goal of eliminating stigmas about mental health. By becoming a part of our community, you agree to uphold these core values:

- We all have a responsibility for our own mental health.
- A person is not defined by their diagnosis and should be treated as an individual.
- No one should feel alone in their mental health journey.
- It's important to speak up when you need support or see someone who does.
- It's essential to use non-stigmatizing, respectful language when communicating about mental illness and suicide.
- Everyone deserves equal access to the care they need.

We believe that anyone can find a way to include these values in their everyday life, and create a ripple effect that brings awareness to mental illness and prevents suicide.

## About the Creators



Jacob Moore is a filmmaker and the founder of [NoStigmas.org](https://www.nostigmas.org), a social movement for mental health awareness and peer support.

Jacob's journey began at six when his father died by suicide. Feelings of abandonment, anger and anxiety grew into panic disorder and eventually clinical depression. Ashamed, he became an expert at wearing a mask to hide his mental illness for over 20 years. This cost

Jacob countless jobs, numerous relationships, his home and very nearly his life. Having hit rock bottom after being arrested, he spent the next three years paying restitution, performing community service and making regular probation visits to the Cook County Jail in Chicago.

Lasting change came when Jacob found peer support and adopted an integrative approach to mental health. Having experienced the positive impact of sharing lived experiences, Jacob created NoStigmas as a place for people to connect, share their story and learn about mental health without feeling alone or ashamed. The community grew and in 2011, NoStigmas became recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit charity.

Jacob speaks and writes on the topics of mental wellness, suicide prevention, stigmas, peer support and holistic health. He is a member of SAG-AFTRA and the American Red Cross Disaster Action Team, has trained as a Mental Health First Aid Instructor and received recognition for his work from SAMHSA, WEGO Health and GreatNonprofits. In addition to being an avid user of both nature and pet therapy, Jacob performs stunts, martial arts and

acrobatics to support his mental wellness. He splits his time between Los Angeles and the open road.



Elizabeth Riegert is a creative professional based in LA, with roots in the Midwest. She earned a B.A degree in Jazz Voice Performance and Composition at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia, which propelled her on an adventure to discover the true nature of creative processes. Elizabeth offers the practices and skills she learned from her exploration to NoStigmas, where she acts as the Creative Director. She believes that the development of a fulfilling creative process is very similar to that of a positive mental wellness plan.

Elizabeth's connection to mental health also comes from lived experience. She is a survivor of rape and sexual assault. After a decade of silence, she is sharing her story not only as a form of healing but also as a means to destroy stigmas about PTSD, demand assault/abuse prevention, and inspire courage.

In addition to her mental health advocacy, Elizabeth is a composer and trains in martial arts. She is a member of Women in Film, which is an organization that supports positive and fair involvement for women in the film industry. Elizabeth is a passionate foodie, enjoys the outdoors and is always looking forward to the next adventure.

## Group Rules

This is a safe space.

**If you're completing this course in a group, please adhere to the following rules:**

- Listen non-judgmentally
- Exercise compassion
- Be honest
- Ask questions
- Take a break if needed
- Respect other people's space
- Confidentially: What happens here stays here\*

*Here's how we do that right now:* Remember that everyone deserves equal time to speak and be heard, it's ok to take a break or not participate in an activity/discussion, and respect

confidentiality.

\*The exception is during an active suicidal crisis or any other circumstance when a person's safety is at risk.

### Group Activity: Rose & Thorn

**Directions:** Each person shares their name, a highlight of the week and something that challenged you. For small groups you can also discuss your "bud" or area of opportunity or growth.

**ON YOUR OWN:** Write down a highlight of the week, something that challenged you and your opportunity for growth in your life.

## Identification of Need

Why are we here? Everyone is affected by mental health in some way. Take a moment to think about why you want to be a NoStigmas Ally.

### The Issue

- 1 in 5 people live with mental illness (National Alliance on Mental Illness)
- 21.5 million people live with substance abuse disorders (National Survey on Drug Use & Health)
- 40 million americans are affected by anxiety (National Institute of Mental Health)
- 350 million people live with depression worldwide (World Health Organization)
- 800,000 people die by suicide every year (World Health Organization)
- Over 1.5 million people call the Lifeline (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) each year
- Stigmas (internal & external) can be a barrier to treatment

Common types of mental health-related Issues:

- Stress
  - Natural part of life
  - Can be physical or mental
  - Each person responds differently
  - Increases metabolic response
  - Can cause damage if unaddressed
    - Tips for reducing stress:
      - Be realistic
      - Exercise

- Talk about it
- Anxiety Disorders
  - There are many types of anxiety disorders
    - Generalized Anxiety Disorder
    - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
    - Panic Disorder
    - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
    - Social Anxiety
  - Often coexist with depression, etc.
  - Treatments: Medication, CBT
- Depression
  - Does not discriminate
  - Causes: Genetic, chemical, situational, environmental
  - Can lead to suicide
  - Highly treatable:
    - Antidepressants
    - Psychotherapy
    - Holistic Approaches
- Substance Abuse
  - 25 million Americans affected
  - Often coexist with depression and other illnesses
  - Treatments:
    - Abstinence
    - Support
    - Medications
    - Therapy
  - Can include
    - Alcohol
    - Illicit Drugs
    - Pharmaceutical
- Crisis & Suicide
  - Often the result of untreated or undertreated mental illness
  - Can lead to trouble with the law
  - Injury to oneself or others
  - Developing a plan to hurt oneself or others
  - Should always be taken seriously
  - Respond with positive action

Of course, this list is not comprehensive. Please refer to the [NoStigmas Learning Center](#) for more information on specific mental health-related issues.

## **Suicide is preventable. Prevention requires action.**

Mental illnesses can be difficult to handle. Treatment and recovery requires time, effort, patience, and a lot of understanding and support.

Unfortunately, those who suffer from mental illnesses often have to deal with much more than just their illness-- they also often suffer from the effects of stigmas, negative representations or stereotypes that unfairly label people with mental illness.

These ideas can be extremely harmful, and are evident in almost every aspect of society, from stigmatizing language in everyday conversation to inaccurate media portrayals of mental illnesses and the people who live with them.

## Stigmas Definition

According to the Oxford Dictionary, stigmas are defined as a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person.

Remember, stigmas exist about both mental health and approaches to wellness. For example, self care isn't just bubble baths.

## Stigmas Are Harmful

Stigmas are more than just attitudes and thoughts.

These have real world consequences for those suffering from mental illnesses that can affect how they live, how they feel, and their relationships with others. People with mental illnesses are more likely to be harassed and discriminated against in terms of housing and employment, and they are more likely to be socially excluded.

Stigmas perpetuate fear.

People often fear what they don't understand. Most of the time, stigmas stem from misconceptions or confusion about mental illness. Many people assume that mental illnesses make a person dangerous or unfit for society. In fact, mental illnesses have been referred to as "invisible" illnesses because it isn't obvious whether a person has one or not. Most people with mental illnesses can and do live normal, healthy, and productive lives.

Stigmas can be a barrier to treatment.

Even though 1 in 5 people in the U.S. suffer from some type of mental illness or disorder, only a third will seek treatment. Some won't even discuss their illness with a friend or loved one for fear of losing their support systems. Internalization of stigmatizing ideas can also lead to just as harmful self-stigma, which causes many to feel ashamed and embarrassed about themselves and their illness.

## So, What Can We Do?

### Get Educated

Making an effort to understand mental illnesses and the people they affect is the first step in eliminating stigmas. Recognize that mental illnesses are not personal weaknesses, but are biological disorders. For example, you don't blame someone for having cancer.

### Be Supportive

If a friend or family member approaches you about their mental illness, listen to them. Be there if they need help. Let them know you care and are concerned about their well-being.

### Avoid Stigmatizing Language

Words like "crazy" or "psycho" are very offensive and can do serious damage to people living with mental illnesses. Educate others when you hear stigmatizing language, and explain how their words can be harmful.

### Promote Awareness

Be an advocate for education about mental illness and changing stereotypes. Support efforts to provide mental health resources and services to those in need. Through your actions, you can make a difference.

## Why Get Involved?

We believe that stigmas, both on the individual and systemic level, are a major cause of underdiagnosed mental illness and a barrier to treatment and crisis intervention.

That's where you come in! Changing these beliefs starts with the individual. We know that we can make a difference through education, intervention and treatment. By connecting to NoStigmas, you can learn how to communicate about mental health, find support, share your voice, find local activities and participate in global activism that can save lives.

NoStigmas is also a place for you to be yourself and connect with like minded individuals about what mental health is really like. No matter where you're at in your journey, there's a spot for you here!

# NoStigmas Ally Training

We crowdsourced the best practices from both lived expertise and mental health and wellness pros. This is a construct for exploring your wellness, not a wellness solution. So, it's up to you to fill in the blanks!

## Course Objective

Empower YOU to be a mental health ally to yourself, others and the cause.

## Course Goals

By going through this training, YOU are discovering your unique path to wellness and are therefore a part of the For Peers By Peers model. You will develop practical skills for addressing mental health issues by learning to:

- Effectively communicate about mental health & suicide
- Build sustainable mental health practices
- Respond to mental health crisis situations
- Provide mental health support to their peers
- Be an advocate for mental health equality

**Systemic change begins on an individual level.**

## Self Care, Peer Support and Advocacy

The pillars of our community include self care, peer support and advocacy. We believe everyone can and should take responsibility for their own mental health. Your wellness journey is your own, and it has unique steps that only you can recognize and choose to take.

### 1. Self Care

This is the bedrock of the NoStigmas Way. Self care is an essential part of your own health and your ability to be an ally for yourself and others. Our individual journeys are unique, and we are whole people with rich identities beyond a diagnosis. When you prioritize your wellness, you become an ally to yourself and lead by example.

## 2. Peer Support

Being an ally to others offers an additional form of support and helps to normalize mental illness. While you alone can take steps toward wellness, we also believe that none of us should have to experience that journey alone. That's why we foster a community dedicated to supporting each other in an environment of acceptance and equality. We believe in speaking up when we see someone in need of support, and not being afraid to ask for that support ourselves.

## 3. Advocacy

Taking positive action for the cause empowers you and gives hope to others, creating a positive ripple effect. Advocacy can be a big part of someone's journey. Many people find using their voice for the cause very cathartic. As both a community and individuals, we're able to take action that promotes mental health equality and suicide prevention. This includes raising awareness about mental health, advocating for the use of non-stigmatized language, promoting access to mental health treatment, and generally taking a stand to further the cause of mental health awareness.

Each of these elements is a lifelong journey without a concrete destination. Since this means something different to each person, the amount of time and effort you invest in each area will differ as well. So, be patient and give yourself a break when learning this material. By living these core values, we can all strive to create a world with NoStigmas!

## Responsibilities & Benefits

Taking responsibility of your mental wellness can be a very difficult step, but it is one that comes with empowering rewards. Through authentic connection, you'll be able to participate in a supportive community that helps you build an accessible path of wellness.

As you complete each module, you'll "unlock" more tangible membership benefits as well:

- One year free subscription to Headspace meditation app
- 7 day free trial of BetterHelp online counseling
- Access to NoStigmas Peer Group & Meetups
- Continuing education & self-help tools
- Awareness and advocacy kits
- Stickers, gear and discounts!

All we ask in exchange is that you respect our core values, interact with compassion, and take positive action in your own way.

Thanks for being a part of this mental health community. Through your stories, support and

advocacy, we can create positive and lasting change for those affected by mental illness and suicide. We're so glad you're here!