

Five myths about mental health you might still believe

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Don't let mental health stigma get in the way of your overall workplace wellness. Credit: Pexels

Mental health affects everyone in the workplace in some way—whether we know someone struggling, or have struggled ourselves. But, despite its commonality, the stigma and myths attached to mental health still keep staff and faculty from reaching out when they need support at work.

Michele Moon, a mental health specialist at UCalgary, says having honest conversations about the narratives we hear—or unintentionally perpetuate—is an important part of demystifying mental health.

"For something that touches us all one way or another, there are still many mental health myths out there producing stigma and misinformation," she says. "But all myths can be dispelled with accurate information."

Read these five mental health myths to update your outlook on mental health in the workplace.

Myth 1: It's weird to talk about your mental health with colleagues or leadership

The stigma surrounding mental health can make it difficult to address our own experiences, especially

in a professional setting. Employees are often scared to open up to managers or co-workers for fear judgement, when in fact mental health concerns are more common than many realize.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), 20 per cent of Canadians will personally struggle with mental health or illness this year. By simply talking about our mental health in the workplace, we can help normalize mental health experiences of all kinds and reduce the stigma that can stop people from reaching out for help.

Myth 2: You need a diagnosis before you can address your mental health

Like most things in life, mental health is a complex continuum where people can find themselves at extremes, or somewhere in the middle. But no matter where we find ourselves, there are actions we can take to promote [good mental health](#).

This continuum is covered extensively in *The Working Mind*, a workshop facilitated by the university to increase awareness of mental health, reduce the stigma of mental illnesses and offer resources to maintain positive mental health and increase resiliency.

Though a diagnosis isn't a requirement to take care of your mental health, it's important to talk to doctors or health-care providers about [mental health concerns](#) as they arise. Early recognition can diminish negative impact and increase opportunities for support.

Myth 3: It's impossible to prevent or prepare for mental health issues, struggles or illnesses

Preventive care is paramount to overall wellness. But when life inevitably gets busy, stressful or overwhelming, our health is often the first thing we sacrifice—and our mental well-being suffers for it.

Prepare for the hard times by building a self-care regime—one that helps avoid burnout, identifies social supports and builds up coping skills. This way, when life throws us a curve ball, established routines can help preserve mental [health](#) and resilience.

Provided by University of Calgary

Get your own [Self-Care Starter Kit](#) today participate in the Building Person Resilience Workshop through WellBeing and WorkLife.

Myth 4: If you have experienced a mental illness, you're a bad employee

As with those suffering physical ailments, people can and do recover from mental illnesses with various treatments, services and supports. Many bouts are temporary and never return. Though some conditions are considered chronic, symptoms can be effectively managed in order to maintain fulfilling and productive lives—at home and at work.

In reality, the CMHA says employees who experience a mental illness can actually be better at managing their stress than employees who don't, because they have already developed strong skills like stress management, problem-solving, and introspection to better manage pressure before it affects their well-being.

Myth 5: Don't reach out to colleagues on leave

When a coworker is on leave for [mental health](#) reasons, it is subject to privacy and respect just like any other leave. But that doesn't necessarily mean the individual can't or won't hear from you.

When an employee goes on leave, they often provide instructions or [contact information](#) for coworkers to get in touch while they're away. Contact your Human Resources representative to learn the individual's preferences, or if your team wants to send a get-well card.

If you have a preexisting personal relationship outside the office with a colleague who is taking some time away from work, keep in touch. Access to a strong network of support can play an important part in getting well.

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