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Central Minnesota Mental Health Center

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Stigma - we hear this word a lot around the concept of mental health, but what does it mean? I could give you a dictionary definition, but personally I don't feel that's very meaningful (or memorable). Actually, I think that a lot of the time we talk about stigma, people stop listening because they feel they've heard it before or that it doesn't really apply to them. But like any form of discrimination or microaggression, mental health stigma is ingrained in our society so in at least some ways, it's ingrained in each of us too. From common words/phrases to assumptions to inaccurate movie representations to harmful medical errors, the effects of stigma on those of us living with mental health challenges can run deep and can impact our recovery.

One of the ways stigma has had a negative impact in my life and my recovery is the labels that I had come to associate with mental illness from the people and media around me. I didn't even know I had internalized these labels until I was first diagnosed with a mental health condition and I began to feel the weight of the beliefs I'd been around (and some I'd held) my whole life. At times in my recovery I found myself doubting everything I was experiencing and deciding I was probably making it all up and "just being crazy." I've been afraid to talk about my symptoms with friends & family because media portrayals are inaccurate and sometimes violent. The stigma throughout society has caused me at times to not reach out because I was afraid of what others might think of me.

While we continue the essential work of reducing mental health stigma in our community and our society, as individuals, we can build our resilience and reduce the effect of the harmful beliefs we've internalized. For me, learning to trust my experiences and reminding myself I am in control of my decisions has made a huge difference in my recovery and in the way I feel about myself.

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"Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we're

supposed to be and embracing who we are."   - Brené Brown

We are the evidence; We hold the hope.