

## **Reducing the Stigma of Depression**

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According to Google, the definition for the word stigma is “a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person”. To me it means it’s a form of discrimination where people don’t understand. In my own experience, I was called crazy for having depression.

In the not so distant past, people with depression were ignored or may have been thrown into mental institutions. There was no such thing as helpful treatment.

I have a friend who was fine and through our first year of high school she was smart, very kind, and determined. But this year I saw a change in her. The changes I saw were that she would always smile for any emotion she felt. She would say she was angry but smile on. The reason this relates back to stigma is that she was putting on a fake smile so nobody would question what she was feeling. If people started to question her she might have to admit she had depression.

I suffer from depression. I’m a straight A student in all honors classes and rank 7th in my grade. But that never made me feel happy. I was acting very negative about my environment at school and home. There wasn’t a day that I didn’t feel like crying. I would put myself to sleep and starve hoping my looks would get better.

One day in one of my classes, my teacher told me that a team of counselors would show a video about suicide prevention. Apparently my reaction toward the whole presentation caught the eye of the Student Assistance Counselor at my school. She pulled me aside and asked me if I wanted to talk with her in her office. I was hesitant but something inside me gave her the okay. I knew about depression but didn’t know what to do. I was lost. Long story short, I wanted help but I was very resistant because I didn’t want my parents to know anything. I didn’t want to be called crazy.

Fortunately my school counselor was as stubborn as me. I would “dig my heels in” but I came around and am currently getting the help I need.

The biggest reason it’s so hard to ask or get help is that people feel ostracized and don’t want to feel alone or judged. People don’t understand.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey was conducted during the Spring of 2017 by the Rhode Island Department of Health and Education, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. They found that nearly 30% of students felt depressed in the last year. Luckily, almost 3 out of 4 students reported that they have a teacher or other adult at school they can talk to for advice.

Growing up in an old fashioned home, there was no such thing as depression. Providing this serious topic and information can help the schools and parents know how to help their children.

Media campaigns and classroom presentations help to reduce the stigma that depressed teens and adults face.

The story of my friend isn’t a very pleasant one. One day, my friend was sexually assaulted.

I noticed something different about my friend but I couldn’t pin point what. She came to school very tired saying she couldn’t sleep. I would ask her almost every day “is everything alright?”

After a month had passed, I got her to tell me what happened and I was shocked and asked her if she had told anyone. She didn’t want to come forward because she was ashamed of herself. She was embarrassed; she was afraid of how people would react, how the counselors would react, and how her parents would react. She feared telling her parents how she was truly feeling. She was depressed.

I went to my counselor and told her the truth about my friend’s incident. My friend was heartbroken when she found out that I told my counselor what happened. I was too because I thought that I had just lost my dear friend’s trust. Since then, she has received help and those

around her are giving her the support she needs in order to heal. She even thanked me for speaking up.

If depression wasn't viewed as bad and more like as a physical illness, more people would come out with the truth and get the help they need without the feeling of being judged. We need people to notice; we need people to know; we need people to help. Having counselors available in the schools makes a big difference.

We will know if the efforts to educate and connect people who are struggling with depression works by looking at other survey numbers. Helping people achieve their potential will lead to stronger citizens, bettering Rhode Island and potentially the world.