

## Mental Illness: Myths and Reality

The concept of mental health can be confusing for school-age children to understand, given the social stigma that still surrounds mental illness today.

By helping children distinguish between mental health myths and reality, educators can help to cultivate a more supportive school environment - one where students can flourish with great mental health.

*Mental Illness: Myths and Reality* offers a customizable 30-minute lesson plan to help elementary school pupils recognize common misconceptions about mental illness.

### Materials

- Pieces of paper, each printed with either one Mental Health Fact or Myth (See Step 1 & Myth vs. Reality)
- Envelopes

### Instructions

1. Prepare the pieces of paper with Mental Health Facts and Mental Health Myths using the list on the final page of this worksheet.  
Place them into the envelopes - each should contain 8 Facts and 8 Myths.  
Remember to hide which are *Myths*, and which are *Reality*!
2. Pair off students and pass out one envelope per student pair.
3. Invite the students to go over the pieces of paper together, working together to separate the *Myths* from the *Reality*.
4. Give the class around 10-15 minutes for the activity, instructing them to rearrange the papers into two columns or lists on their workspace.
5. Using the table provided, discuss the answers as a class:
  - *How can you tell a myth from a fact?*
  - *Why does this difference matter?*
  - *How do you believe mental illness myths impact anyone who has been diagnosed with a mental illness?*

## Myth vs. Reality

Myth	Reality
<p>Mental health illnesses are something that only adults suffer from.</p>	<p>Mental illness can occur in anyone, regardless of their age. Children and teenagers can also develop mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, or panic disorders.</p>
<p>People with a mental illness will struggle with work, study, and life in general.</p>	<p>Mental illnesses can sometimes make different things more difficult. This may include studies, home life, and professional work - but there's always help available. Often, it helps to talk to other people when you are feeling confused or overwhelmed about what to do. Try to think of things that help you relax, cheer up, and even things that make you feel sad or stressed. How can you do more or less of these things to feel better?</p>
<p>Having a mental illness makes life much more difficult. It's tough to live independently when you're an adult, to look after yourself or find a home.</p>	<p>Not all mental health conditions are the same. Living with a mental health illness, or being diagnosed with a mental health disorder, will not necessarily prevent you from living on your own, looking after yourself, or finding your own place to live.</p>
<p>Mental illnesses are for life. There is no recovery.</p>	<p>People with mental health complications recover all the time, and no two illnesses are alike. Some find it helpful to talk to a professional, such as a therapist, while others find support in talking to friends or family. Being diagnosed with a mental health illness does not mean you will struggle with it all your life - with advice and treatment, you can feel better.</p>
<p>There's no point in talking about mental illnesses. Medicine is the best and only way to feel better.</p>	<p>Just like with physical complications, mental illnesses require more than medication alone. If you catch a cold, for example, antibiotics will help - but so will a healthy diet and rest. Managing and recovering from mental health issues involves seeking help and talking to others. With patience and support, you can feel better.</p>
<p>Mental illnesses make people violent, aggressive, and dangerous.</p>	<p>More often than not, people living with mental health issues are not dangerous or violent. In reality, those with mental health complications are more likely to be victims of bullying or abuse.</p>
<p>Some minorities are more vulnerable to mental illness than others.</p>	<p>Anyone can be diagnosed with a mental health complication, regardless of their race, gender, religious background, or where they live.</p>

Myth	Reality
<p>Only weak people are diagnosed with mental illnesses.</p>	<p>Mental illnesses are not the result of your personality, and they do not reflect your capacity to deal with your emotions.</p> <p>While they are called “mental” illnesses, they are not imagined, nor are they due to a lack of willpower.</p> <p>Everyone's mental health journey will look different. With time and experience, you can discover what makes you feel better.</p> <p>Whether this is therapy, social support, medication, or a combination of treatments, it's possible to live a full, happy life despite being diagnosed with a mental health illness.</p>