The Importance of Raising Depression Awareness

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Ending Stigma By Raising Awareness

People suffering from depression often feel isolated and alone, and the stigma around depression and lack of public education about the disease can make it more difficult for those suffering to seek the necessary help.

What is Stigma?

Stigma (according to Dictionary.com) is defined as:

- A mark of disgrace or infamy; a stain or reproach, as on one's reputation.
- A mental or physical mark that is characteristic of a defect or disease.

Feelings of embarrassment, guilt, shame, and being an outcast aren't uncommon among those with depression. Unfortunately, this can often cause hesitation to seek out or accept the help they need.

One of the more common misconceptions among those who have never experienced depression is that the person affected has "nothing to be depressed about." This comes from a lack of understanding that the illness is an internal psychological battle and often has very little to do with surroundings or daily life.

Those with depression can be viewed as weak or unstable which will only add to their existing guilt or embarrassment. As a result, these opinions can often lead to someone who is depressed having trouble finding a job or openly discussing their illness with those they love.

Why Increased Awareness is Important

When people with depression go untreated, they often find other means of coping; this can lead to addictions or suicidal thoughts. Depression awareness among the general public as well as people affected will help to decrease the stigma around the disease, making help and treatment a more viable option.

If a support system made up of trusted individuals like friends or loved ones is easily accessible, those suffering will be more open to share. Of course everyone is different, but knowing that a supportive environment exists could ease some of the stress involved.

For the friends and family of someone who is living with depression, being knowledgeable of the disease and its symptoms will help them be prepared as they will better understand what their loved one is experiencing and as a result be able to offer more substantial support.

It's also important for employers to be knowledgeable about mental illnesses like depression so that they can have a better understanding of how to approach the situation if they have an employee who is suffering. It's equally important for teachers to understand depression so they can provide guidance and information to their

students. This information may also be valuable in the efforts to stop bullying. If students know more about depression and its effects, they might be more likely to help a fellow classmate or show compassion to those around them.

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Ways to Raise Depression Awareness

Talk about it, spread information, and share knowledge and experiences. The more depression is talked about and publicly understood, the less it will seem like a touchy subject. Bell Canada has its annual "Bell Let's Talk" day, which is a great way to open up the conversation. But for those who aren't part of large companies or organizations there are things that can be done on a smaller scale:

- **Social Media:** Facebook is a great way to communicate information to a large number of people. Creating a Facebook page with daily updates that allows people to join and share their experiences will help build a community for people to turn to. Having this as a public page will create a space for those living with depression to turn to as well as providing information to the general population. Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest are other popular social media outlets that could be wonderful tools.
- **Support Groups:** A quick Google search for depression support groups in your community should bring you plenty of opportunities to get involved. If there aren't any groups close by you could try contacting community centers or your local representative and create your own. The more widespread and easily accessible the information is, the more likely people will get involved.
- **School Presentations:** This would be a great way to get teachers and students involved. Gather a few speakers and create a presentation that could be shown in school assemblies or classrooms – this way both students and teachers are receiving the same information. Encourage the teachers and the school to continue the discussion and expand on the information given after your presentation.

- **Volunteer:** There are many walks, runs, or rides throughout the year to raise awareness for a myriad of illnesses. Find one that's devoted to depression and volunteer. Encouraging your friends and family to volunteer with you or get involved in the walk could be a great way to spend the day. The more people involved, either participating or helping out, the more people will be exposed to the foundation and the cause. These events are a great way for foundations to raise funds needed for research and support.
- **Office Events:** This can be as small as a staff meeting or as large as a fundraising event. Having a presentation full of key points and valuable information as well as resources for employees to look into on their own time would be a good way to open up the conversation within the office.
- **Bake Sales and Craft Shows:** This is a great way to raise awareness as well as raise money for an organization or foundation of your choice. Have a brief speech prepared for those that come by your table as well as pamphlets and literature for them to read on their own time. Having hand-outs and links to online resources is not only a good way to raise awareness but it could become a valuable tool to someone living with depression who may not have known where to look for help. You never know who you're talking to or how important the information you're sharing could be.