

Myths about mental illness and counseling

Myth 1: Depression is not a real medical illness.

Although the exact cause of depression is still unknown, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, "Research indicates that depressive illnesses are disorders of the brain...The parts of the brain responsible for regulating mood, thinking, sleep, appetite and behavior appear to function abnormally...important neurotransmitters appear to be out of balance." Based on this research, as well as other medical studies, depression is a "real" medical diagnosis and is very treatable.

Myth 2: Antidepressants will change your personality.

The thought of taking medicine that changes your brain chemistry can be scary. However, antidepressants are designed to change only certain chemicals that underlie the symptoms of depression, not to change your personality. Most people who take antidepressants are actually happy to feel like themselves again, rather than feeling like a different person. It is best to speak with your doctor about the effects that antidepressants can have.

Myth 3: Depression only affects women.

Although women report being affected by depression twice as much as men, depression certainly affects men as well. Often, clinical depression is underreported in men, particularly in cultures that discourage them from asking for help or showing any weakness. Furthermore, men have a higher rate of successful suicide attempts than women, so it is crucial that men seek help for their symptoms.

Myth 4: Counseling is only for crazy or sick people.

People go to counseling for many kinds of problems and concerns. Going to counseling does not mean you are crazy, but rather is a sign of strength that you have insight into things you would like to improve.

MYTH 5: Seeking counseling is a sign of weakness.

There is nothing weak about a person who seeks counseling. In fact, it takes courage to explore sensitive feelings and painful experiences. The individuals who enter counseling are taking the first step in resolving their difficulties.

Myth 6: If I go for counseling, people at school will know my problems or it will go on my academic record.

Your counselor will keep all information you share with them confidential. This means that they will not release any information, or even the fact that they have met with you, to anyone (including parents, professors, friends, or school administration) without your permission. Release of any information is permitted only after a student provides written consent, or in certain legal situations involving a subpoena or court order.

Counseling records are kept separately from academic records and are protected by law.