



STIGMABUSTERS

HOW TO DEAL WITH LOCAL STIGMA

NAMI StigmaBusters are dedicated to the elimination of ignorance, prejudice and discrimination against people with mental illnesses— by changing public attitudes from fear, rejection, and isolation to community understanding, acceptance, and support.

Local StigmaBusting involves NAMI State Org and affiliates contacting local news media (newspapers, TV, radio), legislators, business and professional leaders, neighbors and social acquaintances with information that improves their understanding of mental illness.

PROTEST STIGMA PERPETUATED IN LOCAL MEDIA

NAMI State Org. and local NAMI affiliates need to contact the publisher, editor, writer, radio station manager and/or sponsors by letter, telephone, fax, and/or e-mail. Inform them how an article, TV or radio show, or advertisement is factually incorrect and/or offends, hurts, demeans, or humiliates a person with a mental illness. Include appropriate fact sheets available from NAMI'S HELPLINE (1-800-950-6264) or Web site (www.nami.org).

PROTEST ADVERTISING OR COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS

Protest offensive advertising or commercial products (e.g., T-shirts) found in local stores. Contact company presidents (manufacturer and retail) and local store managers. Ask other local NAMI members and friends to do so as well. Businesses do not want to lose local customers and sometimes respond positively to only a few letters or calls. For retail chains, call the store manager and also ask for the name and contact information of the *regional* manager and/or advertising director.

PRAISE ACCURATE MEDIA PRESENTATIONS

When you see editorials, articles, TV shows or movies that contribute to **accurate** understandings of mental illness (e.g., "**A BEAUTIFUL MIND**") send a message of appreciation and support to the editor, reporter, station manager or producer. Write letters to editors confirming the authenticity of positive representations and relate them to personal experience.

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OUTREACH IS THE KEY TO ELIMINATING STIGMA

Contact civic groups and associations. Find out when they meet and ask to present a program about mental illness. Tell your personal story and/or ask your local NAMI affiliate to provide a consumer speaker through NAMI's **"In Our Own Voice"** program. Include a local psychiatrist. Bring **fact sheets** to distribute. Key target groups include: city councils, county boards of supervisors, boards of education, chambers of commerce, bar associations, Rotary Clubs or similar organizations, PTAs, the League of Women Voters, the counseling or disability offices at colleges and universities, and religious communities.

COMBAT "NIMBYISM" (Not In My Back Yard)

Decent affordable housing for people with mental illness requires active public support. Join your **Homeowners or Neighborhood Association** to help educate members. Encourage NAMI members and friends in other neighborhoods to do the same. **Attend Building and Safety Planning Commission Hearings** to support permits for small group homes, apartments for individuals with mental illness, or other facilities. Numbers always count. The more people who support a plan, the better the chances of success. Bring friends and family members to hearings.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Visit **Human Resources Directors** at local companies. Provide NAMI literature and lists of local support groups for **Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)**. Offer to provide workshops about basic mental illnesses and symptoms, how to seek treatment, and how co-workers can be supportive. Arrange for consumers to tell personal stories about employment and recovery. **From entry level to senior positions, help build informal referral networks for consumers by building personal contacts with local businesses.**

Educate both employers and consumers that mental illnesses need not be discussed in job interviews—but if necessary, once consumers are hired and an employer is informed, reasonable accommodations should be made to help manage their illnesses. Sometimes that can be as simple as occasionally allowing flexible hours. **Acknowledge the importance of a supportive work environment that encourages communication and trust between supervisors and employees.** Highlight success stories. Honor both employers and consumer employees.

Keep in mind: An important way to make stigma disappear is to talk openly, whenever it's appropriate, about mental illness and how it has impacted you or your family—just as we do about other devastating illnesses like cancer, diabetes, Parkinson's, or Alzheimer's.

Join NAMI StigmaBusters at www.nami.org/Stigma