

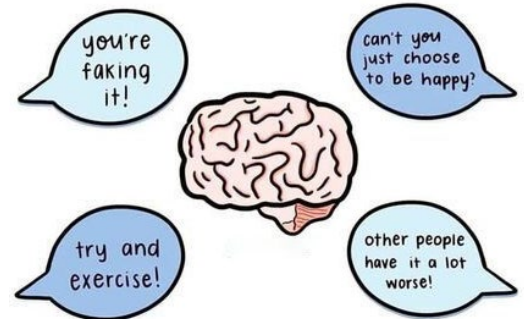
# Fighting Stigma



Mental health stigma refers to negative reactions that society, the people around us, or we as individuals may have towards mental health difficulties. Mental health stigma involves common but inaccurate beliefs that people experiencing depression, anxiety, traumatic stress, or other mental health or substance use problems are different, weak, untrustworthy, or even dangerous.

Mental health stigma can create an environment in which people experience shame and fear related to mental health problems. This can make it difficult to speak up or asking for help we need. For these reasons, combatting stigma is a critical part of supporting each other and preventing suicide in our community.

## WHAT MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA SOUNDS LIKE



### Reducing mental health stigma in the wildland fire community depends on all of us.

#### 1. Know the facts.

Mental health difficulties can easily be misunderstood, leading to inaccurate beliefs and judgement. Educate yourself about mental health problems and recovery, especially experiences common among wildland fire personnel such as depression, anxiety, traumatic stress, and substance use disorders.

#### 2. Talk about mental health.

Stigma is maintained by silence. Mental health challenges are common, especially for those working in high-stress positions such as those in the wildland fire service. We can combat stigma and support those who are struggling by openly discussing mental health challenges, experiences of getting help, and stories of recovery in our community.

#### 3. Be aware of your words, attitudes, and behaviors.

Our beliefs about mental health are communicated to others through our words and actions. A joke, an eye roll, or stigmatizing language send powerful messages that can reinforce shame and silence. This stigma can keep others from seeking help.

#### 4. Normalize mental health care as part of overall health and readiness.

As public servants working in wildfire response, we take on unique roles and responsibilities that can be stressful and demanding. Routinely addressing physical and mental health needs is essential to effective performance and maintaining long-term health and wellbeing across a fire season or a career.

#### 5. Educate others.

Share accurate information about mental health, convey hope and support, and challenge myths and stereotypes. Know the resources available and be able to share when needed.



*If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide or are in distress, dial or text 988 for free, confidential support available 24/7.*

**988** SUICIDE & CRISIS  
**LIFELINE**

Suicide Prevention Week – 2023, NWCG Mental Health Subcommittee

<https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/mental-health-subcommittee>