Why doesn’t she come around anymore? Have you noticed how weird he’s been acting? I wonder what could be the cause of his behavior. Have you ever found yourself asking these questions about someone? Do you know someone who is losing interest in social activities and has little to no energy, feeling numb or as if nothing matters, drinking or smoking more than usual? Maybe your close friend is involved in turbulent relationships with friends and family or suffering from severe mood swings that are causing problems in their relationships. These are some characteristic of mental health problems.

But first you might ask what exactly mental health is? Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. Examples of mental illnesses are anxiety disorders, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, depressive and other mood disorders, eating disorders, sleeping disorders and others.

In 2011, studies showed that mental health problems plagued 1 in 5 Americans with 1 in 10 of the younger population experiencing major depression. For some time, the mention of mental health has been a scary and taboo subject to address. Discrimination because of the lack of education can be intentional and direct such as negative remarks about mental status or subtle and unintentional from someone who is misguided on what mental health issues look like. Either way the effects can be harmful and detrimental but solutions can be found and implemented. Because of the stigma placed on mental health those suffering may be reluctant to seek help, lack understanding from friends and family, or experience bullying and harassment. Knowledge of mental health is imperative to eradicating its stigma.

The first step to overcoming the stigma of mental health is through education. Every year the World Health Organization (WHO) joins forces with the World Federation for Mental Health to observe October 10th as World Mental Health Day; this initiative was created in 1992. The objective of this day is to raise awareness around the world and gain support in helping to increase knowledge. On this day participants are involved in increasing awareness to discuss their contributions and how to educate others and increasing advocacy to bring forth the reality of mental health.

Others steps for overcoming stigma and increasing awareness is to treat people with dignity and respect as this is representative to how everyone would like to be treated. Avoid labeling and do not use derogatory names such as “crazy” “nuts” “psycho” and other hurtful words. Being conscious of others and their feelings breaks down barriers for those suffering to feel comfortable with disclosing their illness and also shows support and understanding. Lastly, respect the rights of those who are suffering from mental illnesses, as discrimination against those with mental illnesses in employment, housing and education is illegal.