

## Ten Things Your Congregation Can Do to Reduce the Stigma Surrounding Mental Illness

1. **Publish or write** a newsletter article on mental illness
2. **Encourage and support** members of your community, who are willing to come forward and share their story with others
3. **Respond openly** to mental illnesses; recognize the ongoing stress and sense of loss experienced by families of those with mental illnesses; offer support, concern and frequent respite.
4. **Keep in touch** with a person who is temporarily institutionalized.
5. **Become informed:** stay alert to news about developments in research and care; identify local agencies that provide information and services in order to have it at hand when needed.
6. **Look carefully** at the expressions of basic theology so as not to blame or perpetuate the concept of sin, guilt and lack of faith as reasons for mental illness.
7. **Recognize** the role of established faith communities and clergy as opinion setters; educate to dispel myths and allay people's fears.
8. **Collaborate** in consciousness-raising with other faiths, social service agencies, and consumer organizations.
9. **Organize** active outreach to mentally ill persons and their families through a proper congregational committee (*Bikkur Cholim*)
10. **Provide** space for support groups to meet.

(Adapted from *Our Congregation as a Caring Community: Paint a Different Picture of Mental Illness* by Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen, D. Min., FCOC, AMHA. Available through Pathways to Promise)