Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

How-to guide: Raising awareness about mental illness

You understand the importance of bringing more awareness to the realities mental illness – but what can you do? You don't have a national television show, you're not a famous athlete, you have no upcoming sold-out concerts – so, will anyone listen to you? The answer is easy: absolutely. You may not have an obvious audience of thousands, but knowledge breeds knowledge, and knowledge spreads. Things that may seem small can have large effects. Read our how-to guide below that has a few examples of do-it-yourself micro advocacy work that can have a big impact.

- **Share your story**

  If you have first-hand experience with mental illness – your own or that of someone close to you – share it with people. If you share your story in a way that is up front, honest and straightforward, you can demonstrate for others that it is possible to be truthful about mental illness without risking being shamed or excluded. The more people that speak up about their experiences, the more stigma is challenged.

- **Talk to the media**

  You may not have your own show, but you can still have your voice heard. Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper, or dial up a call in radio show – this is an excellent way to educate people in your community.

- **Fundraise for the cause**

If a certain mental illness has affected your life, there are likely a number of organizations dedicated to education around it. Get in touch with an organization near you and see if they have any fundraising events coming up where you can get involved. You can also organize your own fundraising event and donate the earnings — a dance-a-thon, bake sale, volleyball tournament, a clothing swap with a small entrance fee — the possibilities are endless!

- **Have an awareness week at work**

  Bring mental illness awareness into your workplace: some offices already have weeks devoted to getting people to talk more about mental illness. If yours doesn't, you can start one. Talk to your colleagues and managers and organize some events around the issue – invite individuals from different mental health organizations to come talk to your team or plan a fundraising event.

- **Challenge harmful media representations**

  When you see a movie that shows an inaccurate portrait of a mentally ill person, or a news report that sensationalizes mental illness, say something. It can be as simple as just speaking out loud your disagreement with what is portrayed, and it can get others to question what they see.

- **Use social media**

  Social media channels like Facebook and Twitter are powerful ways to spread awareness: share articles and events about mental illness and you are guaranteed to immediately reach a great number of people.

What all of these examples have in common is communication; at the end of the day, communication is the key to raising awareness. The more you speak, share, write, blog, listen, disagree, encourage, and just keep talking, the more information you spread and change will follow.