

Implementing the EASE Awareness principle: Using the ISMI with Clients

EASE = Education, Awareness, Shift perspective, Empower

One way to help clients become more **Aware** of self-stigma is using the Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness (ISMI) to start discussion.

It is a 29-item measure with five subscales: alienation, stereotype endorsement, perceived discrimination, social withdrawal, and stigma resistance. The person is asked how much s/he agrees or disagrees with each statement, on a 1-4 scale. A full copy of the ISMI is on the back of this handout.

In addition to its use in research, the ISMI is an excellent way to start discussions about self-stigma -- to increase awareness and understanding about how stigma can come up in one's thinking and one's life. It can also highlight areas of strength and resilience.

You could use the ISMI in a number of ways. Some examples:

- In a group discussing specific individual items
- Asking an individual client to complete the entire measure and then discuss answers with a counselor
- Group or individual discussion of items in only one sub-scale, to focus on that topic
- Point out areas of strength reflected by lower stigma item scores and higher resistance item scores.
- Completing it with a client every couple months to discuss changes over time
- Use specific items as prompts for journaling or self-expression projects.
- You can come up with many others!

The ISMI can also be a useful way to discuss internalized stigma with trainees or co-workers.

Note: Within the VA staff can access the ISMI within Mental Health Assessments

Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness Inventory (ISMI)

We are going to use the term "mental illness" in the rest of this questionnaire, but please think of it as whatever you feel is the best term for it. For each question, please mark whether you strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), or strongly agree (4).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I feel out of place in the world because I have a mental illness.	1	2	3	4
2. Mentally ill people tend to be violent.	1	2	3	4
3. People discriminate against me because I have a mental illness.	1	2	3	4
4. I avoid getting close to people who don't have a mental illness to avoid rejection.	1	2	3	4
5. I am embarrassed or ashamed that I have a mental illness.	1	2	3	4
6. Mentally ill people shouldn't get married.	1	2	3	4
7. People with mental illness make important contributions to society.	1	2	3	4
8. I feel inferior to others who don't have a mental illness.	1	2	3	4
9. I don't socialize as much as I used to because my mental illness might make me look or behave "weird."	1	2	3	4
10. People with mental illness cannot live a good, rewarding life.	1	2	3	4
11. I don't talk about myself much because I don't want to burden others with my mental illness.	1	2	3	4
12. Negative stereotypes about mental illness keep me isolated from the "normal" world.	1	2	3	4
13. Being around people who don't have a mental illness makes me feel out of place or inadequate.	1	2	3	4
14. I feel comfortable being seen in public with an obviously mentally ill person.	1	2	3	4
15. People often patronize me, or treat me like a child, just because I have a mental illness.	1	2	3	4
16. I am disappointed in myself for having a mental illness.	1	2	3	4
17. Having a mental illness has spoiled my life.	1	2	3	4
18. People can tell that I have a mental illness by the way I look.	1	2	3	4
19. Because I have a mental illness, I need others to make most decisions for me.	1	2	3	4
20. I stay away from social situations in order to protect my family or friends from embarrassment.	1	2	3	4
21. People without mental illness could not possibly understand me.	1	2	3	4
22. People ignore me or take me less seriously just because I have a mental illness.	1	2	3	4
23. I can't contribute anything to society because I have a mental illness.	1	2	3	4
24. Living with mental illness has made me a tough survivor.	1	2	3	4
25. Nobody would be interested in getting close to me because I have a mental illness.	1	2	3	4
26. In general, I am able to live my life the way I want to.	1	2	3	4
27. I can have a good, fulfilling life, despite my mental illness.	1	2	3	4
28. Others think that I can't achieve much in life because I have a mental illness.	1	2	3	4
29. Stereotypes about the mentally ill apply to me.	1	2	3	4