

# CLINICIAN ADVICE

## Stigma, Discrimination and Mental Health



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# Advice from a Clinician

Answered by Teresa Chan, Coolminds Clinical Advisor

***My past experiences of being discriminated against have really impacted my self-esteem, and I often feel insecure. What are some ways I can heal from this and gain confidence?***

Try to understand why you feel the way you do. Self-esteem is how we see and feel about ourselves, and many people will experience low self-esteem at some point in their lives.

It can be caused by a number of things - comparing yourself to your friends/peers, difficult past experiences, problems with family or at school.

Try to challenge negative thoughts and feelings, and remind yourself of the positives that you may be overlooking, e.g:

- *Is there another way of looking at things?*
- *What advice would you give to a friend who was having similar negative feelings?*
- Remind yourself about things that have happened which prove or indicate that these negative thoughts you may be having about yourself aren't true.

You could also start by identifying a positive quality/characteristic or a strength about yourself, or a positive experience that demonstrated this:

- *When was the last time you received a compliment?*
- *The last time you did something for someone that made you feel good?*

These might seem like small things, but it is important to recognise and learn to appreciate all the good things about yourself, and the reasons why people appreciate you for being who you are.

If you're really struggling with negative feelings about yourself, try to talk to someone you trust, like a family member or teacher. You can also talk to your family doctor who will be able to tell you what sort of support might be available to you.



**Seek help from a mental health professional** – getting yourself better is the priority. Treatment (this can be counselling or medications) will help identify the issue and address therefore reducing or eliminating the symptoms which have been disrupting your life. Getting help, understanding your condition and connecting with others who have also struggled will help you build your resilience. If your condition affects your academic performance (i.e. a specific learning difficulty or ADHD) get support at school. A clear learning plan will help you reach your potential. If teachers are unaware of the issues faced by their students it may lead to discrimination or a labeling of a “bad student”.

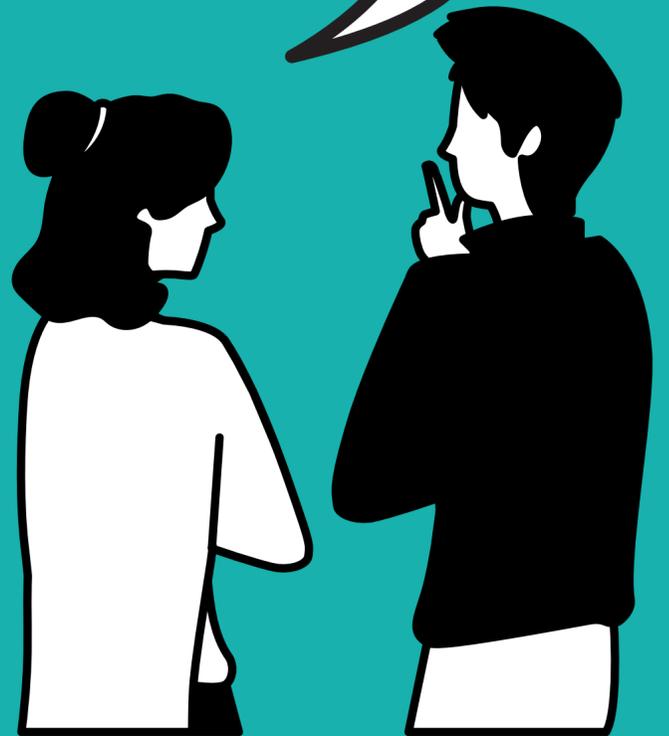
**Don't self stigmatize**, this is when we allow the stigma to influence the way we think and feel about ourselves and our situation. Self stigma stops us from seeking help, and you may start to believe that your condition is due to your personal weakness.

**Don't define yourself by your illness.** Your mental health struggle is something you experience but it is not you, you are much more than your illness. Reframe statements like “I am schizophrenic” to “I have schizophrenia”

**Don't isolate yourself.** When you struggle with your mental health you may be hesitant to share this with anyone. However, your friends, family, teachers and coaches could offer you compassion and support. Reach out to those you trust, and surround yourself with supportive people.

**Speak out against stigma.** In your recovery, consider speaking about the harmful effects of stigma. You may do this through sharing your own experiences or speaking about it more generally. If you do choose to speak about your experiences make sure you are well supported in doing this, as this can be difficult.

**What are some coping mechanisms I could try when I am affected by mental health stigma?**



**How does racism and discrimination impact a young person's mental health?**

**Young people are particularly vulnerable to the damaging effects of racism and discrimination.** A recent study\* revealed a strong and consistent link between race-based discrimination and negative child health and wellbeing outcomes such as anxiety, depression and psychological distress. It also showed a relationship between race-based discrimination and behaviour problems such as 'delinquent behaviours'.

Racism can affect our mental health in various ways, including:

- stress and negative emotions, having negative physiological and psychological effects
- individuals *disengaging* from healthy activities and coping by *engaging* in unhelpful behaviours that impact negatively on their health (such as smoking and excessive alcohol consumption)



\*Research has linked racism to higher rates and risk of anxiety, depression and psychological distress (Priest et al. 2013).

**How can young people do to combat prejudice and discrimination in society?**



If you are experiencing racism, **try to talk to someone you trust** (as it can help to have another person aware of what is happening and how you are feeling).

It can also help to **find supportive groups and communities** who might understand what you are going through (as it can be difficult to explain how you feel to someone who has not experienced racism, whether directly or indirectly).

Online communities can be one way to find like-minded people with similar experiences and shared interests that you can talk to, share with, and have a safe space to be heard.

**Remember that you are not alone.**

**Learn and know what your rights are and how to report abuse if necessary.** This can help you feel empowered and remind you that what you are experiencing is not okay and no one should believe that it is.

Try your best to provide them with **a safe space** in which they can express themselves and their experiences, and let them know they are not alone. Depending on the context, work with them to reach out to relevant support systems (such as a teacher or a parent).

**What should I do if I witness someone being discriminated against?**

## Where to Get More Support

**A List of Community Resources**  
(click the name of the resource to visit its website)

### **Government Departments:**

[Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities](#) - a list by the Race Relations Unit of the Home Affairs Department

[Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres](#) - provide social work intervention for children and youth 6-24

[Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness](#) - provide community support, social rehabilitation services, clinical assessment and treatment for those aged 15 or above and their family members or carers.

### **Government-funded Non-Profit Making Organizations (NPOs):**

[Christian Action SHINE Centre](#): Self-help and Mutual-help Groups for ethnic minorities who encounter social and economic problems.

[Hong Kong Christian Service CHEER Centre](#): *Counselling, guidance and referral services are provided by registered social workers for all ethnic minorities in Hong Kong and all organisations serving ethnic minorities, to facilitate their swift settlement in Hong Kong.*

[Hong Kong Community Network LINK Centre](#): Registered social workers offer counselling or referral to appropriate government department or agencies. Specially trained ethnic minority staff offer translation services.

[International Social Service](#): Counselling and Guidance services for ethnic minorities with HKID cards.

[New Home Association HOME Centre](#): Individual and mutual support for all ethnic minorities in Hong Kong

[Yuen Long Town Hall Support Service Centre for Ethnic Minorities](#): Provides counselling and referral service to pertinent organizations, offers emotional support, and gives sessions on problem-solving and stress-management skills for Hong Kong ethnic minority residents aged 9-27.



### **The Zubin Foundation - Ethnic Minority Well-being Centre (EMWC)**

The EMWC serves those in the ethnic minority community who would like to talk to a counsellor about their mental well-being. All counsellors are able to speak English plus Hindi/ Urdu. Counselling service is only available for individuals aged 16 or above. If you have not reached 18 yet, you are required to get your parents' consent in order to receive our counselling service.

- Address: 5/F, Unit F-J, Block 2, Kwai Tak Industrial Centre, 15-33 Kwai Tak Street, Kwai Chung, Hong Kong
- Contact number: 9682 3100 (for enquiries on EMWC and making appointments) / 2540 9588 (general enquiries on The Zubin Foundation)
- Email: [info@zubinfoundation.org](mailto:info@zubinfoundation.org)

### **Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service - Yau Tsim Mong Family Education and Support Centre**

Mutual help groups, individual and family counselling are provided for all ethnic minorities in Hong Kong.

- Address: 5/F, 396 Shanghai Street, Yaumatei, Kowloon
- Contact number: 2781 2921/ 6821 9115/ 6821 9114
- Email: [ytmfesc@yang.org.hk](mailto:ytmfesc@yang.org.hk)

### **Christian Action (Woo Sung Street Centre)**

Self help and mutual help groups for ethnic minorities who encounter social and economic problems.

- Address: 4/F., Lee Kong Commercial Building, 115 Woo Sung Street, Jordan, Kowloon
- Contact number: 3422 3820
- Email: [emisc@christian-action.org.hk](mailto:emisc@christian-action.org.hk)

### **The Salvation Army Yau Ma Tei Integrated Service for Young People**

Focuses on growth and counselling, to foster a sense of belonging to Hong Kong among the ethnic minority group and help them adapt to life in Hong Kong.

- Address: 1/F Block 4, Prosperous Garden, 3 Public Square Street, Kowloon
- Contact number: 2770 8933
- Email: [ymtis@ssd.salvation.org.hk](mailto:ymtis@ssd.salvation.org.hk)

## EMERGENCY SUPPORT

If you are experiencing strong levels of distress or trauma which are interfering with your life, remember that you do not have to face it alone, and that **help is available**.



For emergency support, please contact the hotlines below:

Emergency hotline: 999

The Samaritans 24-hour hotline (Multilingual): (852) 2896 0000

Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only): (852) 2389 2222

Suicide Prevention Services 24-hour hotline (Cantonese only): (852) 2382 0000

OpenUp 24/7 online emotional support service (English/Chinese):

[www.openup.hk](http://www.openup.hk)

More support services can be found [here](#):

<https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/emergency-hotlines/>

More non-urgent support services can be found [here](#):

<https://www.coolmindshk.com/en/communitydirectory/>

For more youth mental health information and resources, check out our Coolminds website. You can learn more about our upcoming events and trainings for parents, teachers and students, and read blog articles and stories written by young people in Hong Kong.

## RESOURCES

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