

Wellness for Black Girls Podcast

Ep 8 Mental Health #StigmaFree

[00:00:00] **TaReon Jael:** Welcome to the Wellness for Black Girls podcast, a biweekly podcast that aims to empower Black women on their holistic health journeys by moving through the dimensions of wellness. I'm your host TaReon Jael, a Certified Health Educator and Clinical Lab Scientist. For more information, please visit wellnessforblackgirls.com. While I hope you enjoy listening to and learning from the podcast please remember that it is not intended to be a substitute for a relationship with a licensed healthcare provider. Now let's get into this episode.

Thank you for [00:01:00] joining me for episode number eight of the Wellness for Black Girls podcast. Previously on the podcast, I talked about National BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month, and shared a little about my mental health journey. I shared a little of my story so that if you're experiencing something similar, you can know that you're not alone.

I also shared some of the practices that I've implemented in my life that have helped me to manage the symptoms of anxiety and depression. Now, I don't want to give the impression that all you have to do to manage mental health challenges is exercise more, eat better, pray and meditate more, journal more, basically do all of the healing work entirely on your own. And everything will be perfect. For a long time I believed that. And when I still felt low, I blamed myself for not being [00:02:00] motivated enough, for not praying and meditating more...not *being* enough. Of course, this was a symptom of the anxiety and depression, but it also stemmed from the mental health stigma that I had internalized.

But once I decided to push past the self-stigma and open up to my close friends and family members, as well as my healthcare providers to ask for help. That's when things started to improve in my life. So in this episode, we're going to talk about stigma, it's different forms and the ways we can work to end mental health stigma.

But before we get into today's episode, I want to ask a quick favor. I'm looking for feedback from you. So, if you've been listening to a few podcasts episodes, I'm looking for you to share a little bit more about yourself. It's a quick [00:03:00] online survey with the few open ended questions to help me get a better understanding of what you're currently experiencing.

As it relates to your overall wellness, you can be as detailed or as brief as you'd like. This will help me create future content that speaks to your experiences. You can choose to submit your responses anonymously, but if you choose to submit your name and email address, I'll be randomly selecting someone to receive a \$50 gift card from BLK & GRN, which is an online, all natural marketplace by all black artisans. If you're interested in sharing a bit about yourself to help me with future podcast episodes, go ahead and check out the show notes for a link to the survey . So now that I've asked the quick favor, let's get into today's topic...ending mental health stigma.

[00:04:00] There are many reasons why people develop mental illness.

Some are genetic or biological, and others are a result of trauma, some stem from overwhelming stress from school, work or home life and others stem from experiencing repeated injustice and/or violence. And in a lot of cases, it may be a combination of a few or all of these things. But regardless of the cause mental health disorders are health problems, just like other health problems.

I know you're ready for some data on the topic. Mental illnesses are common in the United States. According to data from the National Alliance on Mental Illness, nearly one in five, US adults live with a mental illness. And the National Institute of Mental Health reports that the prevalence of mental illness [00:05:00] is higher among women compared to men. And in terms of race/ethnicity, the prevalence of mental illness was highest among adults who report belonging to two or more race/ethnicities. To touch on data, as it relates specifically to Black Americans, we know that approximately 13.4% of the US population identifies as Black or African American. Of those 16.2% reported having a mental illness. That's over 7 million people.

Given this data, we know that mental illness is prevalent yet we know that mental health stigma remains. Mental health stigma is defined as unconstructive, attitudes, beliefs, views, and behaviors that affect individuals and society. And these unconstructive [00:06:00] attitudes, beliefs, views, and behaviors cause fear, rejection, avoidance, prejudice and discrimination against individuals with mental health illnesses. There are two types of stigma, public stigma, and self-stigma. Public stigma is based on other people's beliefs that those with mental illness are weak, incompetent, or even dangerous. And self-stigma comes into play when we believe about ourselves, the negative things that others believe, or that we fear they believe, about us. To say it plainly we internalize others' views and attitudes.

One example of self-stigma involves labels that we tend to use when we encounter someone that behaves in a way that we view as abnormal.

We may say things like, "That person [00:07:00] is psycho/bipolar/crazy". When we hear statements like these and recognize that we are not feeling our best mentally, we may think to ourselves, as black women, "I already have so much to deal with being a woman and being Black and the negative labels that people place on me. I don't want to have to deal with being labeled as "crazy", too. This often causes many who are experiencing mental illness to feel trapped, to feel like we have to keep up appearances and avoid treatment.

So I want to provide some quick tips on how we can help end mental health stigma and start the process of healing from self stigma.

The first step involves educating ourselves .By educating ourselves we learn the facts. This helps us and those around us [00:08:00] began to break down those barriers and dispel the stigma associated with mental illness. The next thing we can do is to be aware of our views. We take a moment to think about our views on mental illness and ask ourselves, "Where do these views come from? And do these views cause me to treat others differently?"

Next thing is to be aware of the language and the labels that we use. So we avoid using terms like "psycho" "crazy" "schizo" "bipolar" "maniac" and other terms like that.

The next thing is to monitor media and speak out against stigmatizing material. I don't want to promote "call out" culture. So instead let's "call in" media platforms that present material that is stigmatizing.

[00:09:00] This next step comes along with educating ourselves. This is where we share what we've learned and speak up about stigma to friends, family, and colleagues. One way to do this would be to share this podcast episode with them, or even better, you could listen to this episode together and use it as a way to jumpstart dialogue about the topic.

The next thing we can do is to support organizations that fight mental health stigma. A few organizations include the National Alliance on Mental Illness, also known as NAMI, Mental Health America, the Boris L Henson Foundation, and the Loveland Foundation.

Now let's talk about starting the process of healing, self stigma.

Oftentimes, when we're living with mental illness, we can fall into the "why try?" cycle.

[00:10:00] Why should I try to take care of myself? Why should I pursue my goals, my dreams, or my creative outlets, but I would argue that it's essential to take care of yourself and to treat yourself with love and compassion, because you deserve it.

We can start healing self-stigma by accepting the fact that there are things in life that are out of our control, and the development of mental illness is one of those things. We can't control this process, but we can control how we respond to it. We can respond to the diagnosis of a mental illness by practicing self acceptance. When we practice self acceptance, we embrace all parts of ourselves. The strengths and the weaknesses...our humanity unconditionally. And the awareness of our weaknesses does not [00:11:00] interfere with our ability to fully accept ourselves.

The next thing we can do is to be mindful and intentional about how we fuel our bodies, because we know the things we eat and drink affect our body and mind.

The next thing involves getting proper sleep. This is critical to good physical and mental health, because inadequate sleep can trigger the body stress response.

Next, we want to be mindful of our physical activity because physical activity has the ability to improve our mood by boosting those feel good neurotransmitters and endorphins. The point is to do something that gets us out of our heads and into our bodies. These activities may include going for a mindful meditative walk or engaging in a [00:12:00] yoga practice. I'm planning on having a special guest on the podcast to talk to us about mind- body practice, and activism. The interview is currently in the works, so be expecting to hear more about that in the future.

The next thing we can do is to reach out to a primary care provider and or therapist if we're experiencing any type of mental distress. I've mentioned before, can try searching your

health insurance company's provider directory and/ or the Psychology Today and Therapy for Black Girls directories.

I want to emphasize that many mental health providers offer sliding scale therapy, which is treatment priced by each person's income. This fee structure exists to help make therapy more affordable and [00:13:00] makes it possible to pay in cash if necessary. So be sure to ask about this sliding scale therapy option upfront if you feel this option may work best for you and your needs.

I've recently been hearing great things about Better Help, which is an online platform that makes professional counseling accessible, affordable, and convenient. After signing up, they match you to an available licensed, trained, and experienced mental health provider who fits your objectives, preferences and the type of mental health challenges you're dealing with. I've not personally worked with them, but I'll include a link to their website in the show notes if you like to check them out.

The next thing is connection. I've mentioned in previous episodes about the many benefits of having strong, healthy, social support networks. I mentioned this in episode four, and [00:14:00] we touched on how social support helps our mind by improving our ability to cope with stressful situations, alleviating the effects of emotional distress, promoting lifelong good mental health and enhancing self esteem. So if we have supportive people in our life, we can share what we're going through with them. Research has shown that speaking openly about mental illness decreases negative effects of self stigmatization. When we're open about our condition, worry and concern over secrecy are reduced. This openness can then promote a sense of, of power and control over our lives.

These are my quick tips for working towards ending mental health stigma. I hope you found these tips helpful, useful, and practical. If you did, please head to Apple podcasts and [00:15:00] leave a five star rating and review.

And again, a quick reminder about the survey. If you're open to sharing a bit about yourself to help me with future podcast episodes, then go ahead and check out the show notes for a link to the survey. You can also find links to references and resources mentioned in this episode by heading to wellnessforblackgirls.com and clicking on episode number eight.

Again, I hope you found the information in this episode helpful, and will try using some of these practices in your life and together we'll continue moving through the dimensions of wellness.