



ENGAGE:

Challenge your assumptions

TRY THIS TRUE-FALSE QUIZ:

1. Parenting is a significant life domain for adults with behavioral health conditions.

True False

2. Adults with mental health conditions are as likely as other adults to have children.

True False

3. Their children will definitely have problems.

True False

4. A parental mental health condition alone does not increase the likelihood of child abuse.

True False

5. Parenting may be challenging, but children are often a source of meaning and hope for parents.

True False

SEE BELOW FOR ANSWERS

THE ANSWERS:

1. True. Parenting is a priority for many people, right up there with housing and employment, and they wish to parent well.

2. True. Adults living with behavioral health conditions are at least as likely to be parents as individuals without mental health or substance abuse diagnoses. This is true for men as well as women.

3. False. Their children will not necessarily have problems. It's not a direct link.
 - a. Yes, some illnesses have a biological connection; inheritance can make a child prone to developing problems.
 - b. However, children themselves have resources – children can be sturdier or more vulnerable – at different ages and stages, and depending on when and for how long they are “exposed” to a parent’s behavioral health condition.
 - c. They benefit from supports, education about mental health, and help with coping strategies – to develop resilience.

4. True. Parents with behavioral health conditions are not necessarily abusive.
 - a. We do know that an accumulation of challenges may increase the likelihood of abuse or neglect – for example, poverty, unemployment, mental health conditions and substance abuse.
 - b. All parents benefit from supports to overcome adversity.

5. True. Yes, raising children presents challenges, but this is true for all parents.
 - a. Many aspire to the typical life goals most of us share – parenthood, family life, etc.
 - b. Children can be a source of motivation and hope for the future for parents.

WHY ARE THESE ANSWERS IMPORTANT?

- a. All parents benefit from supports. With the right supports, outcomes for parents and their children can be improved.
- b. Working with adults living with behavioral health conditions who become parents is the earliest form of prevention of problems in children.
- c. Parents should be supported and reinforced for seeking help, rather than fearing negative attitudes and stigma from practitioners, or fearing the potential loss of custody that may happen when untested assumptions are made about parents’ capacity to do a good enough job.

CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS:

It is critical to examine your own assumptions and opinions about parenting and behavioral health challenges – mental illness and addictions. You have a unique background and history of experiences that have shaped how you view the world. Your family, friends, colleagues, and the professional and social circles in which you spend time inform your worldview. Layered on top of these influences is the impact of the media and how it shapes your perceptions of both parenting and behavioral health. Acknowledging your assumptions may be difficult. Exploring why you feel the way you do and where your ideas come from about certain experiences or groups of people can be challenging, painful and complicated. You may have a parent with mental illness or a substance use issue, for example, and have childhood experiences of providing care for your parent. You may be a parent living with addiction issues and in recovery. You may need support in understanding how your personal experiences of parenting, health and wellbeing affect you today, as a parent, family member or as a practitioner. It may be helpful to connect with a supportive family member, friend, or a peer with similar lived experiences, or with an online or Facebook group as you sort this out.