

Reducing Stigma (Youth)


haveTHAT talk



Reducing Stigma

What is Stigma?

Stigma is a set of negative beliefs, prejudices and negative behaviours toward groups of people.¹ People face stigma for many reasons. This includes their race, religion, gender, sexuality and economic situation.

How Does Stigma Affect People?

People living with mental illnesses often face stigma. This can occur when people do not understand mental illnesses. As a result, they may treat people living with mental illnesses as outcasts or think that they are dangerous or strange. This type of stigma can make people with mental illnesses feel ashamed, hopeless, stressed or that they are to blame for their illnesses. This makes it hard for people to reach out for help or accept it.

It's important to remember that mental illnesses are like other health conditions. They need proper treatment and support. The sooner someone gets help, the better the outcome will be.

Reducing Stigma

There are many ways to reduce stigma, and with practice, it becomes easier over time.

- Think about your own beliefs. Do you have stereotypes and prejudices about mental illnesses? Do you judge people with mental illnesses?
- Consider the words you use in everyday conversations. Words like “crazy” or “psycho” can hurt people with mental illnesses and make them feel afraid or hopeless.

Learn more about mental health, mental illness and substance use health. Trusted resources like [Mind Your Mind \(English only\)](#), the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#), the [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#), and the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#) can provide you with more information. This will help you understand more about how people living with mental health challenges feel and how you can support them.

Additional Resources

English

- [YouthNet](#)
- [People-First Language](#)
- [Online Stigma Course](#)
- [Stigma and Discrimination in Mental Illness](#)

French:

- [Réseau Ado](#)
- [Langage axé sur la personne](#)
- [Formation en ligne sur la stigmatisation](#)
- [Combattre les préjugés sur la maladie mentale](#)
- [Stigmatisation et discrimination en matière de santé mentale](#)

Videos English

- [Promoting Mental Health: Finding a Shared Language](#)

French

- [Promouvoir la santé mentale : adopter un langage commun](#)

¹ Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). (n.d.). *Stigma and Discrimination*. Retrieved from: <http://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/stigma-and-discrimination/>

Activity 1: How Does Stigma Affect Us All?

Goal

- To understand what stigma is and how it affects us.

Messages

- Stigma is set of negative beliefs about someone who we think is different from us. People face stigma for many reasons. This includes their race, religion, sexuality, and economic situation.
- Stigma prevents people from reaching out and getting help.
- People who live with mental illnesses deal with stigma. They may be treated differently because of negative attitudes in our society.

Time

- 15-20 minutes (depending on the size of the group).

Supplies

- Video: [“Reducing Stigma.”](#)
- Flip chart paper and markers.

Activity

- View the video: “Reducing Stigma.”
- Ask participants to share what they saw, felt and heard.
- Ask the questions below to stimulate discussion and write the responses on a flip chart paper:
 - “What is stigma?”
 - “Have you experienced a time in your life when you felt different? How did it feel?”
 - “What are ways that we can reduce stigma?”

Possible Answers

Stigma is:	Feelings related to stigma could be:	Ways to reduce stigma:
- Negative attitudes. - Being mean to people. - Treating other people poorly. - Hurting other people. - Judging people for things that are not in their control.	- Feeling isolated, overwhelmed, or afraid for safety. - Not able to do usual activities. - Fear of judgement. - Not knowing where to get help.	- Think about your biases and judgements. - Think about what you see and hear in the media. - Learn about mental illness and connect with people who live with mental illness. - Talk to others about stigma.

Words matter!

Negative words like “psycho” or “crazy” hurt people with mental illnesses and can make them feel hopeless and ashamed.



Activity 2: Discoveries

Goal

- Learn about ways to reduce stigma.
- Learn how to support people living with mental illnesses.

Messages

- Learn more about mental health, mental illnesses, addictions and substance use health from a trusted source.
- Offer support to people with mental illnesses. Even small things like having a coffee together can make a big difference.
- Mental illnesses are like any health condition. They need proper treatment and support. The sooner someone gets help, the better the outcome.

Time

- 15-20 minutes (depending on the size of the group).

Supplies

- View the video: [*“Reducing Stigma.”*](#)
- Flip chart paper and markers.
- One *“Discovering Stigma”* activity sheet for each participant.

Activity

- View the video: *“Reducing Stigma.”*
- Distribute the *“Discovering Stigma”* activity sheet.
- Ask participants to complete each statement.
- After 5-10 minutes, ask participants to share their responses.
- Write the responses on the flip chart paper.
- Encourage other participants to write down answers that they like.

Possible Answers

I discovered that	I noticed that	Ways to reduce stigma
• Stigma still exists. • Stigma is a big problem. • Stigma makes people feel hopeless. • Stigma stops people from getting help.	• Stigma can be stopped. • Small things can help. • I am able to do something to reduce stigma. • Everyone can help - with or without a mental illness.	• Think about your biases and judgements. • Think about what you see and hear in the media. • Don't use hurtful words. • Talk to others about stigma.

Discovering Stigma

Thinking about stigma...

I discovered: _____

I noticed: _____

I plan to: _____

I will tell: _____

Date: _____

Signature (optional): _____



Activity 3: True or False?

Goal

- To correct common myths about mental illnesses.

Messages

- Myths about people living with mental illnesses add to stigma.
- For some people, the stigma surrounding mental illness can be worse than the illness itself.

Time

- 15-20 minutes (depending on the size of the group).

Supplies

- Video: [*“Reducing Stigma.”*](#)
- “True” and “False” signs posted on opposite ends of the room.

Activity

- View the video: *“Reducing Stigma.”*
- Read the statements written below, out loud, one at a time (do not read the “T” or “F”).
- Ask participants to walk to the “True” or “False” signs according to their guesses.
- Discuss each statement as a group prior to proceeding. Please refer to the *“discussion guide”* found below to help facilitate your conversation with the group.

True or False Statements

1. Mental health and mental illness are the same thing. (F)
2. Mental illnesses only affect certain people. (F)
3. People do not recover from mental health problems. (F)
4. People with mental health challenges should deal with it on their own. (F)
5. Most people will be affected by a mental illness at some point in their lives. (T)
6. All cultures view mental health and mental illness in the same way. (F)
7. We have some control over our mental health. (T)

Discussion Guide

1) Mental health and mental illness are the same thing (False).

- Mental health describes a person's state of well-being. Individuals with good mental health are able to manage their stress, work well, and help their community. Different communities have different ways of understanding and talking about mental health.
- Mental health can change over a lifetime. It is related to the environments where people live, learn, work and play. Individuals can experience positive mental health, with or without a mental illness. They can also experience poor mental health with or without a mental illness.
- Positive mental health protects people from the stress of everyday life. It can reduce the risk of developing poor mental health and mental illness.

2) Mental illnesses only affect certain people (False).

- Mental illnesses can affect anyone. They can impact people of all ages, incomes, social status, religion, and ethnicities.
- Sometimes, if a person is experiencing symptoms of their mental illness, how they are feeling, thinking and behaving may be different from what is normal for them.

3) People do not recover from mental health problems (False).

- People can recover from mental health problems. Getting help is important. Sometimes people need the support of a counsellor, a social worker, a physician, a psychologist or a psychiatrist. They may also need the help and support of friends and family and the understanding of co-workers or classmates.
- Sometimes embarrassment or fear of rejection stops people from getting the help they need. Many people experience mental health problems in their lives. With help they are able to recover and have full, happy lives.

4) People with mental health challenges should deal with it on their own (False).

- When people are having trouble with their physical health, they often go to the doctor or ask others for help. Unfortunately, because of stigma, many people do not ask for help with their mental health. Mental health challenges can be related to how the brain is working. It is important to get help and support from a professional, or others, such as trusted friends, family, and people in your community.

5) Most people will be affected by a mental illness at some point in their lives (True).

- Mental illness is a diagnosable illness that affects our thoughts, feelings and actions. In Canada, one in five people will experience a mental illness in any given year. Mental illness not only affects the person living with the illness, but it

also can affect their family, friends and community who care about their well-being.

6) All cultures view mental health and mental illness in the same way (False).

- Mental illnesses affect people of all ages, education, income levels, and cultures. Mental illness, like any other illness, is diagnosed by a doctor and treated by a healthcare professional. Cultural beliefs shape our understanding of mental health and mental illness. For example, some believe that mental illness is a curse or punishment from God or is caused by evil spirits. These beliefs are stigmatizing. Stigma makes it harder to ask for support. This is important because the sooner someone gets help, the better their outcome.

7) We have some control over our mental health (True).

- Life is full of changes that can cause stress and affect our mental health.
- We cannot always control these challenges in life, but we can control how we respond and take care of our mental health. Here are some ideas:
 - Taking care of our health.
 - Developing positive and realistic ways of thinking about ourselves and the world around us
 - Talking to others we trust about our mental health.
 - Making sure we have a network of friends and family for support.
 - Reaching out for help when we are struggling.

Adapted from: Ottawa Public Health. Youth Connections Ottawa – implementation guide: A toolkit for implementation of the Youth Connections Ottawa peer-to-peer program. Ottawa, ON: Ottawa Public Health; 2023.

Talking about mental health is one of
the best ways to reduce stigma in
your community.

