

Reducing Stigma

Stigma is a set of **negative beliefs** and **prejudices** about a group of people, as well as **negative behaviors** towards groups of people.



Reducing Stigma

What is stigma?

Stigma is a set of negative beliefs and prejudices about a group of people, as well as negative behaviors towards groups of people.² Many people face stigma because of their race, religion, gender, sexuality, economic situation and a variety of other things.

How does stigma affect people?

People living with mental illnesses often face stigma. This can occur when people do not understand mental illnesses and as a result treat people living with mental illnesses as outcasts or may even think that they are dangerous. 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 help.

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.

How can we help reduce stigma?

You can think about your own beliefs. Do you have stereotypes and prejudices about mental illnesses? Do you judge people with mental illnesses?

You can also think about 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.

As well, you can learn more about mental health, mental illness and substance use from trusted sources like the [Mind Your Mind](#), [Canadian Mental Health Association](#), [the Mental Health Commission of Canada](#), the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#) and [Bell Let's Talk](#). This will help you understand more about what people living with mental health challenges and illnesses feel and give you information on how to support them.

Additional Resources

Resources are hyperlinked. If printing activity the guide, please review resources online.

Websites

English:

- [Cross-cultural Mental Health and Substance Use](#)
- [Fighting the Stigma Surrounding Mental Illness](#)
- [Framework to Help Eliminate Stigma](#)
- [Myths about Mental Illness](#)
- [YouthNet](#)

French:

- [Cadre pour aider à éliminer la stigmatisation](#)
- [Combattre les préjugés sur la maladie mentale](#)
- [La tête haute](#)
- [Les mythes au sujet des maladies mentales](#)
- [Réseau Ado](#)

Videos

English:

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

French:

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

² . Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario. Stigma and Discrimination. Retrieved from: <http://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/stigma-and-discrimination/>

Activity 1: How Does Stigma Affect Us All?

Goal

- To understand stigma and how it affects us.

Messages

- Stigma is set of negative beliefs or prejudice about someone who we think is different than us. Many people face stigma because of their race, religion, sexuality, economic situation and a variety of other things.
- Stigma prevents people from reaching out and getting help.
- People who live with mental illnesses deal with stigma and 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

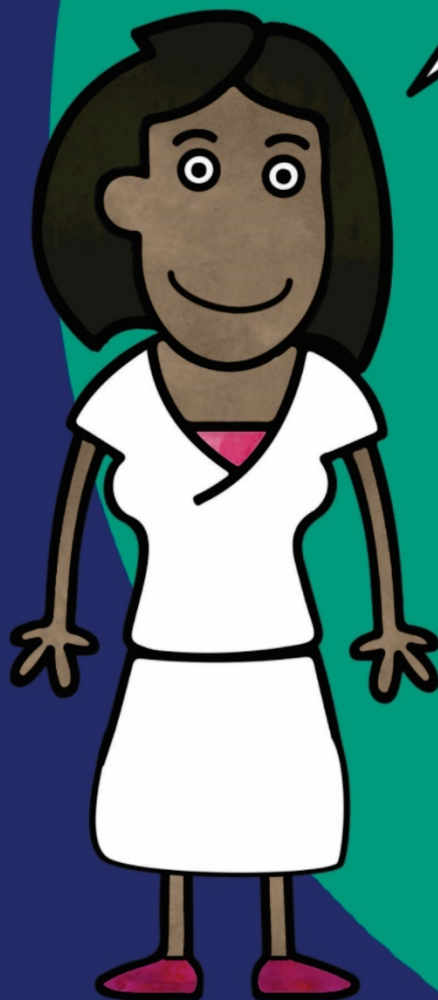
Facilitator Steps

1. Watch the video: Reducing Stigma
2. Ask participants to share what they saw, felt and heard.
3. Suggested questions to stimulate discussion:
 - a. What is stigma?
 - b. Have you experienced a time in your life when you felt different? How did it feel?
 - c. What are ways that we can reduce stigma?
4. Write responses on flip charts.

Possible Participants' Answers

- 2) Stressed and overwhelmed. Worried about what his friends will think. Does not want to be seen at the clinic.
- 3 a) **Stigma is:** negative attitudes, being mean to people, treating other people poorly, hurting other people.
- 3 b) **Feelings related to stigma could be:** isolated, overwhelmed, afraid for safety, not able to do usual activities, fear of judgement, not knowing where to get help.
- 3 c) **Ways to reduce stigma:** think about your biases and judgements, think about what you see and hear in the media, don't use hurtful words, 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 illness and can make them feel hopeless or ashamed.



Activity 2: Discoveries

Goal

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

Messages

- Learn more about mental health, mental illnesses and substance use 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

- Video: Reducing Stigma
- Flip chart, paper and markers
- One “Discoveries” activity sheet for each participant

Facilitator Steps

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

Possible Participants’ Answers

I discovered that: stigma still exists, stigma is a big problem, stigma makes people feel hopeless, stigma stops people from getting help

I noticed that: stigma can be stopped, that small things can help, that I CAN do something to reduce stigma, that everyone can help with or without a mental illness

Ways to reduce stigma: think about your biases and judgements, think about what you see and hear in the media, don’t use hurtful words, learn about mental illness and connect with people who live with mental illness, talk to others about stigma.



Small steps can have a big impact. What is one thing you can do to help reduce stigma around mental illnesses?

What Did You Discover Today?

Thinking about stigma...

I discovered that: _____

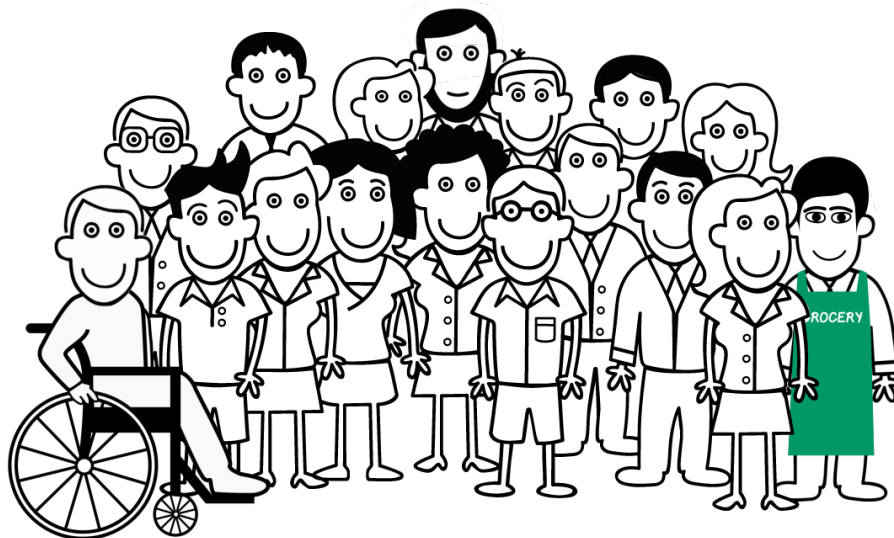
I noticed that: _____

I plan to: _____

I will tell: _____

Date: _____

Signature (optional): _____



Activity 3: Agree or Disagree?³

Goal

- To correct common myths about mental illnesses.

Messages

- Myths about people living with mental illnesses add to stigma.
- Some people think that people living with mental illnesses are weak or dangerous.
- Some people say the stigma around mental illnesses is worse than the illness.

Time

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

Supplies

- Video: Reducing Stigma
- “**AGREE**” and “**DISAGREE**” signs posted at opposite sides of the room.

Facilitator Steps

1. Watch the video: Reducing Stigma
2. Read out the first statement.
3. Ask participants to walk to the agree or disagree signs according to their beliefs.
4. Discuss each statement as a group prior to proceeding to the next statement. Please reference Possible Participant Answers as a discussion guide.

Agree or Disagree Statements

- a. People with mental illnesses are violent and dangerous.
- b. People with mental illnesses are poor and/or less intelligent.
- c. Mental illnesses are caused by a personal weakness.
- d. Mental illnesses are a single, rare disorder.
- e. People with mental illnesses are usually homeless.

Discussion Guide

- a. As a group, mentally ill people are no more violent than any other group. In fact, they are far more likely to be the victims of violence than to be violent themselves.
- b. Many studies show that most mentally ill people have average or above-average intelligence.⁴ Mental illness, like physical illness, can affect anyone regardless of intelligence, social class or income level.
- c. A mental illness is not a character flaw. It is an illness, and it has nothing to do with being weak or lacking will-power. Although people with mental illness can play a big part in their own recovery, they did not choose to become ill, and they are not lazy because they cannot just ‘snap out of it.’
- d. Mental illness is not a single disease but a broad classification for many disorders including: anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, personality disorders, eating disorders and organic brain disorders.
- e. While many homeless people have mental health or substance use issues, not all people with mental illnesses are homeless. Many people living with mental illness have jobs, go to school, and have families.

³ Student Support Leadership Initiative, Oxford, Elgin, London/Middlesex (2014) Bounce Back... Again, 2nd Edition. Retrieved from: <https://www.healthunit.com/bounce-back>

⁴ Canadian Mental Health Association, CMHA Pamphlet Series (1993). Retrieved from: http://www.acsmcn.ca/CLIENTS/1-acsmcn/docs/upload/sys_docs/Myths_of_mental_illness.pdf

Everyone has a right to participate fully in his or her community, including people living with mental illness.

