



Stigma Information Sheet

Definition

Stigma are negative attitudes or discrimination against individuals or groups based on a particular characteristic, associated with substance use disorders (SUDs) as well as other physical, mental and behavioral health conditions.

Prevention

STIGMA IS PREVENTABLE!!

- Using “person first” language matters
- How we refer to people with substance-related conditions may inadvertently elicit and perpetuate stigmatizing attitudes
- Stigmatizing language impacts investment and availability of recovery supports, access, and willingness to participate in recovery
- Describing Substance Use Disorder (SUD) as treatable helps

Understanding

Stigma can be practiced by individuals, organizations and agencies, communities and society. Prevention practitioners are in a unique position to reduce the stigma surrounding substance misuse and mental illness:

- Formally through messaging
- Informally in conversations with colleagues and stakeholders
- Often work across the continuum of care
- They have opportunities to influence professional in various settings including mental health, human services, and public health.

Recognizing

Recognizing Stigma and taking action:

- Employ pro-health messaging and use person-first language
- Conduct a language audit
- Support and enhance individual coping strategies
- Provide information and support
- Shape public views on substance use disorders
- Engage community stakeholders in discussions
- Change laws and policies that contribute to stigma
- Self-Stigma: Is when an individual internalizes negative stereotypes about individuals, including themselves

Types

- Public Stigma: Attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals and groups)
- Structural: Laws, regulations, and polices



Stigma Reducing Strategies

Individual Level Strategies

- Use “person first” language – refer to people having a problem which can be addressed, rather than the person as the problem
- Be aware of how trauma and unintentional bias may impact an individual’s willingness to disclose

Public Level Strategies

- Engage community stakeholders in outreach efforts and developing messages
- Convey the potential for a range of positive changes and pathways to recovery

Organizational Level Strategies

- Identify the intended audience, and how to use language when communicating with this group
- Correct negative attitudes held by colleagues, coworkers, and potential allies
- Leverage the potential opportunities I have in my prevention role to dispel myths about addiction
- Prioritize maximizing connection, worth, inclusion, and community membership
- Provide information and support
- Update laws and policies that promote anti-stigma approach

Sample Resources

[Addictionary® \(recoveryanswers.org\)](https://recoveryanswers.org) This is an online dictionary of addiction-related terms to help the general public and health care professionals “modify their language about addiction.”

[Words Matter: How Language Choice Can Reduce Stigma](#) This resource provides an overview of language and outlines strategies to assess and develop stigma-free messages that “are positive, productive, and inclusive.”

[Stigma Resources from the TTC Networks \(June 2022\)](#) This list of resources from the Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network, Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network, and Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network.

[Engaging People Who Use Drugs in Prevention Efforts: Strategies for Reducing Stigma](#) This tool explores actions practitioners can take to reduce stigma toward members of the drug-using community in order to better engage them as partners in prevention efforts.