

Combating Stigma Against People Who Use Substances

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Central East (HHS Region 3)

PTTC

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Stigma refers to various negative attitudes, values, and beliefs that manifest in prejudice and discrimination against people. Stigma often stems from stereotypes or lack of knowledge. People who misuse substances or have a substance use disorder (SUD) are frequently stigmatized.¹ Experiencing stigma can cause many harms, leading to feelings of shame, fear, frustration, or anger. It can also worsen health outcomes.² Stigma can reduce public support for prevention and SUD-related services.

STIGMA COMES IN MANY FORMS³

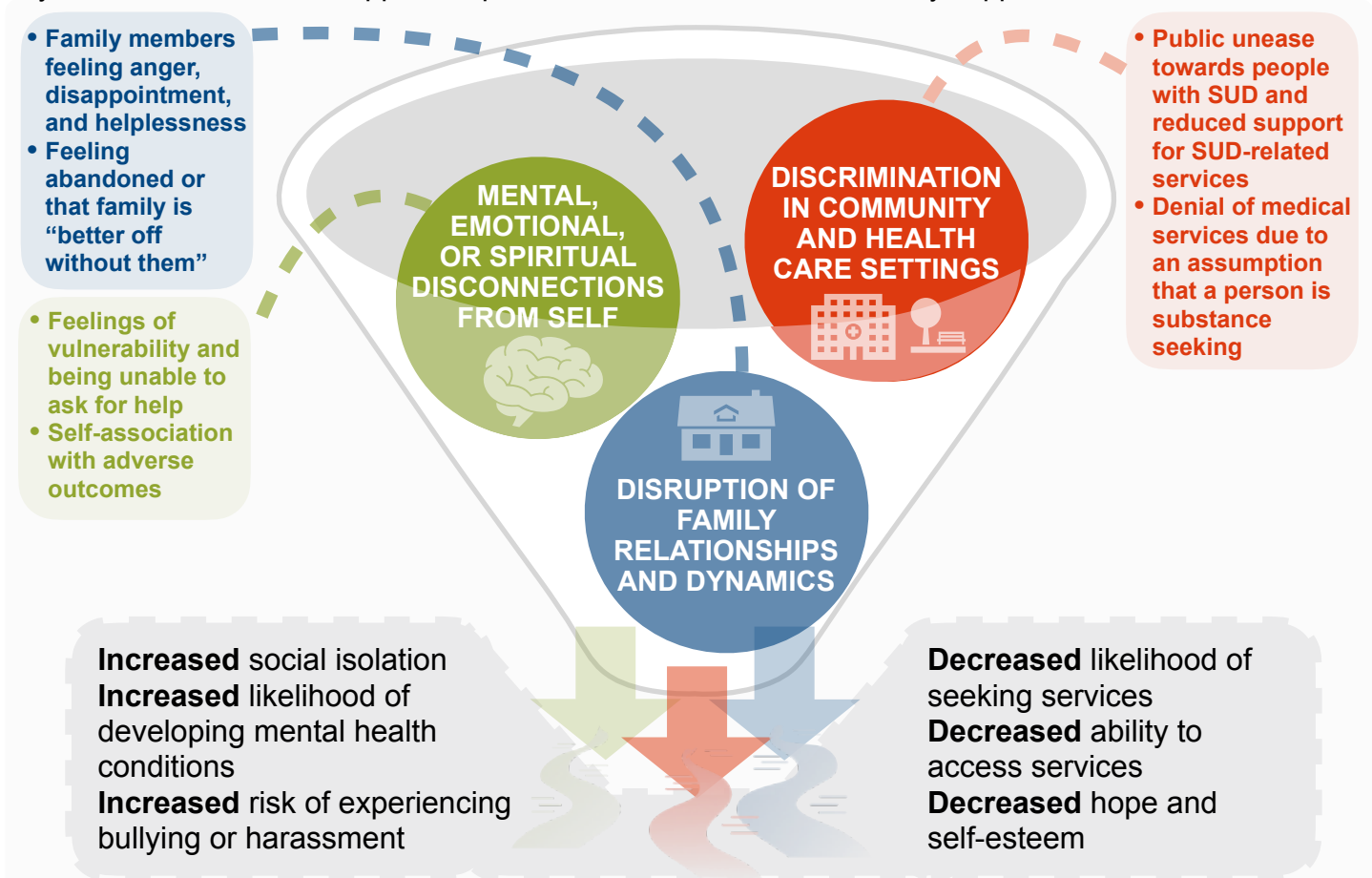
- 1 PUBLIC:** Negative values and beliefs we have about others
- 2 SELF:** Internalized negative values and beliefs we have about ourselves
- 3 INSTITUTIONAL:** Systemic, policy-driven actions that limit opportunities

➔ **INTENTIONAL:** Knowingly making negative value judgments about people

➔ **INADVERTENT:** Unknowingly spreading stigma, such as using careless or harmful language or supporting policies with unintended negative outcomes

THE EFFECTS OF STIGMA

Stigma toward people who misuse substances or have an SUD can negatively impact them in numerous ways, and it can diminish support for prevention, treatment, and recovery support services.³



WHAT CAUSES STIGMA?⁴

Stigma often stems from **INCORRECT** beliefs and stereotypes, such as:

- All people who use substances are dangerous and unpredictable
- People who use substances are never capable of making decisions for themselves
- Prevention, treatment, and recovery services do not work
- Substance use is a moral or character failing

HOW CAN WE ADDRESS STIGMA?^{3,5,6,7} *Click on the links below to learn more.*

AT ALL TIMES...

- [Use person-first language](#)
- [Show compassion and avoid judgment](#)
- [Treat everyone with dignity and respect](#)
- [Speak out against stigma when encountering it](#)

AS A PREVENTION PROFESSIONAL...

- [Share success stories from prevention, treatment, and recovery](#)
- [Educate ourselves and others about misperceptions](#)
- [Share coping strategies for dealing with stigma](#)
- [Protect the privacy of people in need of services](#)
- [Understand the science behind evidence-based services](#)
- [Educate the community on substance use issues and the science of addiction](#)
- [Raise community awareness of the importance of a public health approach to prevention](#)
- [Create a marketing strategy to address stigma](#)

AND ADVOCATE FOR...

- [Parity of care between physical and behavioral health](#)
- [Substance use education and anti-stigma training in the criminal justice system](#)
- [Employers to address stigma in the workplace](#)
- [Harm reduction programs](#)
- [Ending media perpetuation of stigma](#)

NOTES

1. Stringer, K. & Baker, E. (2018). Stigma as a Barrier to Substance Abuse Treatment Among Those with Unmet Need: An Analysis of Parenthood and Marital Status. *Journal of Family Issues* 39(1), 3-27.
2. Utah State University (n/d). Substance Use Disorder Stigma: What it is and How You Can Prevent it. <https://extension.usu.edu/heart/research/how-to-prevent-substance-use-disorder-stigma>
3. American Psychiatric Association (2020). Stigma, Prejudice and Discrimination Against People with Mental Illness. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/stigma-and-discrimination>.
4. Yang, L. et al (2017). Stigma and Substance Use Disorders: An International Phenomenon. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry* 30(5), 378-388.
5. Zwick, J. et al (2020). Stigma: How It Affects the Substance Use Disorder Patient. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* 15(50).
6. Office of National Drug Control Policy (n/d). Rural Community Action Guide. <http://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rural-community-action-guide.pdf>
7. Great Lakes PTTC (n/d). Preventing and Reducing Stigma in Community Sectors. <https://pttcnetwork.org/centers/great-lakes-pttc/preventing-and-reducing-stigma-community-sectors>

