



The Stigma of Substance Use: Its Impact and What You Can Do

September 29, 2022

Community Overdose Engagement (CODE) Technical Assistance Workshop

Learning Objectives



Participants will increase knowledge about:

- The definition, manifestations, and impact of stigma.
- The human side of overdose prevention and public health.
- Why choosing the “right” words matters.
- Strategies to address stigma in and out of the work environment.



What Is Stigma?



humiliated

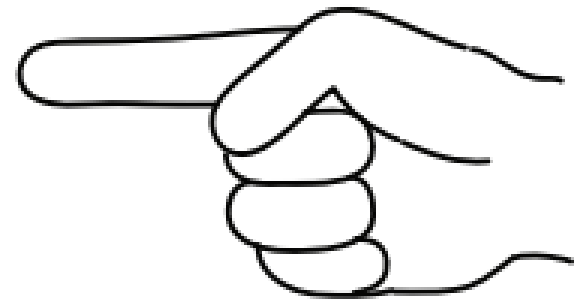
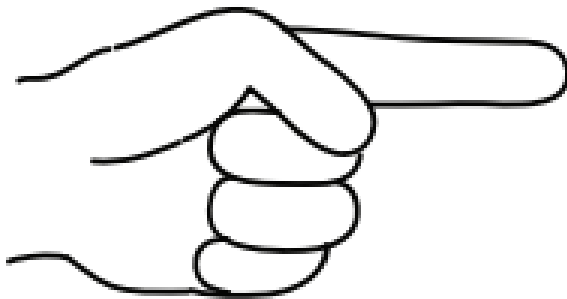
discrimination

shame

rejected

dishonor

devalued



disgraced

scorned

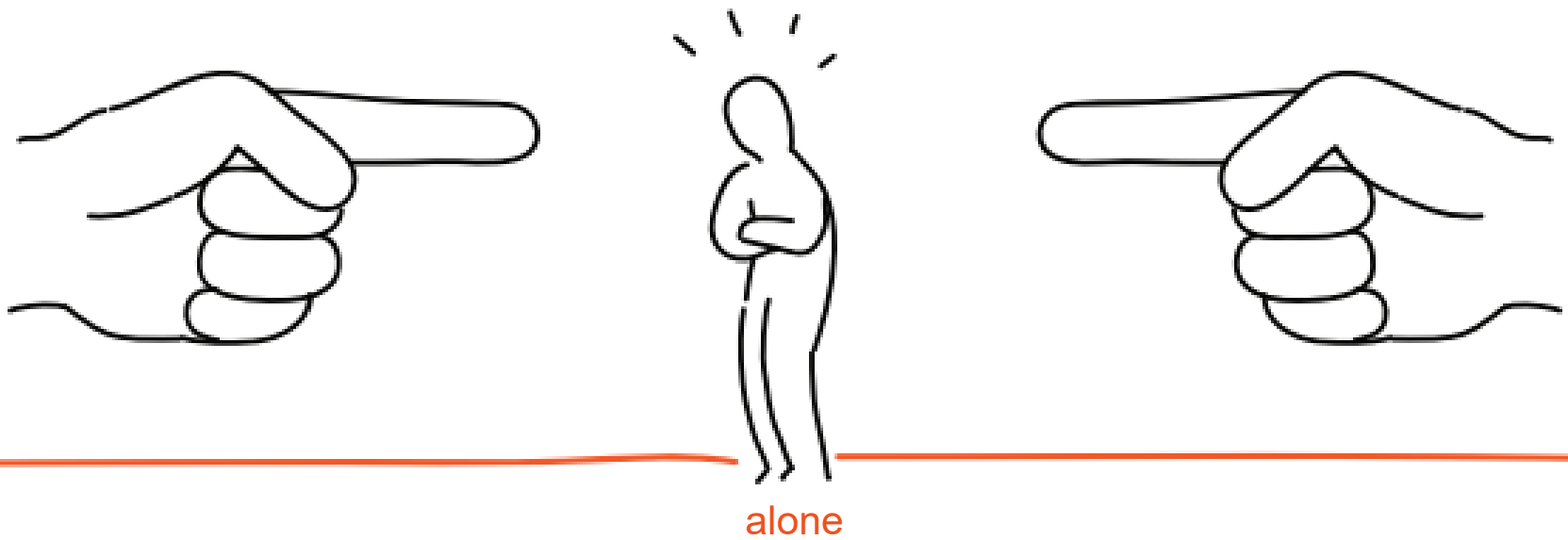
isolated

prejudice

guilty

different

What Is Stigma?



What Is Stigma?



stigma noun

/'stigmə/

Definition of *stigma*

1. A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person.

Synonyms for *stigma*

Shame, disgrace, dishonor, humiliation, and (bad) reputation.

Why Does Stigma Still Exist?



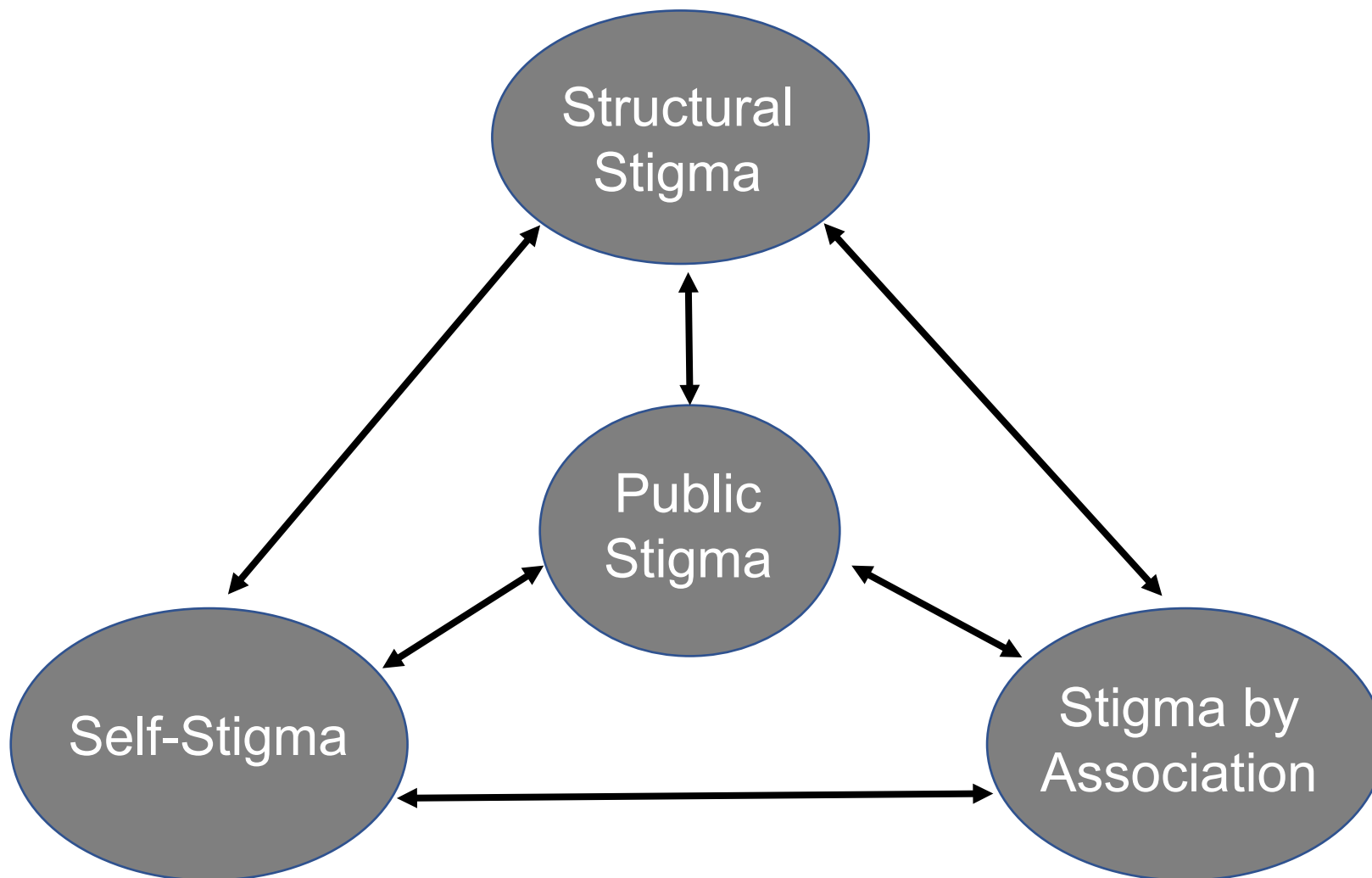
2018 Survey:

- 20.3 million individuals 12+ experienced a substance use disorder in the past year.

Why does stigma still exist?

- Humans can be judgmental/learned behavior
- Compassion fatigue
- Lack of education and excess of misinformation
- Systemic stigma: racism, classism, etc.
- Others?

Four Types of Stigma³



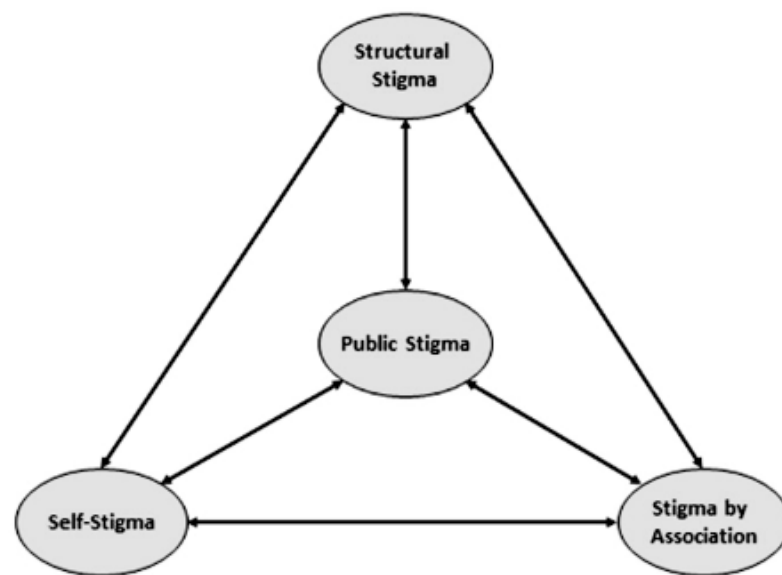
Four Types of Stigma³

Public Stigma: People's social and psychological reactions.

Self-Stigma: Social and psychological impact of being part of a stigmatized group, which perpetuates negative beliefs and feelings associated with the stigmatized condition.

Stigma by Association: Social and psychological reactions to people associated with a stigmatized person (e.g., family and friends).

Structural Stigma: "Legitimation and perpetuation of a stigmatized status by society's institutions and ideological systems."



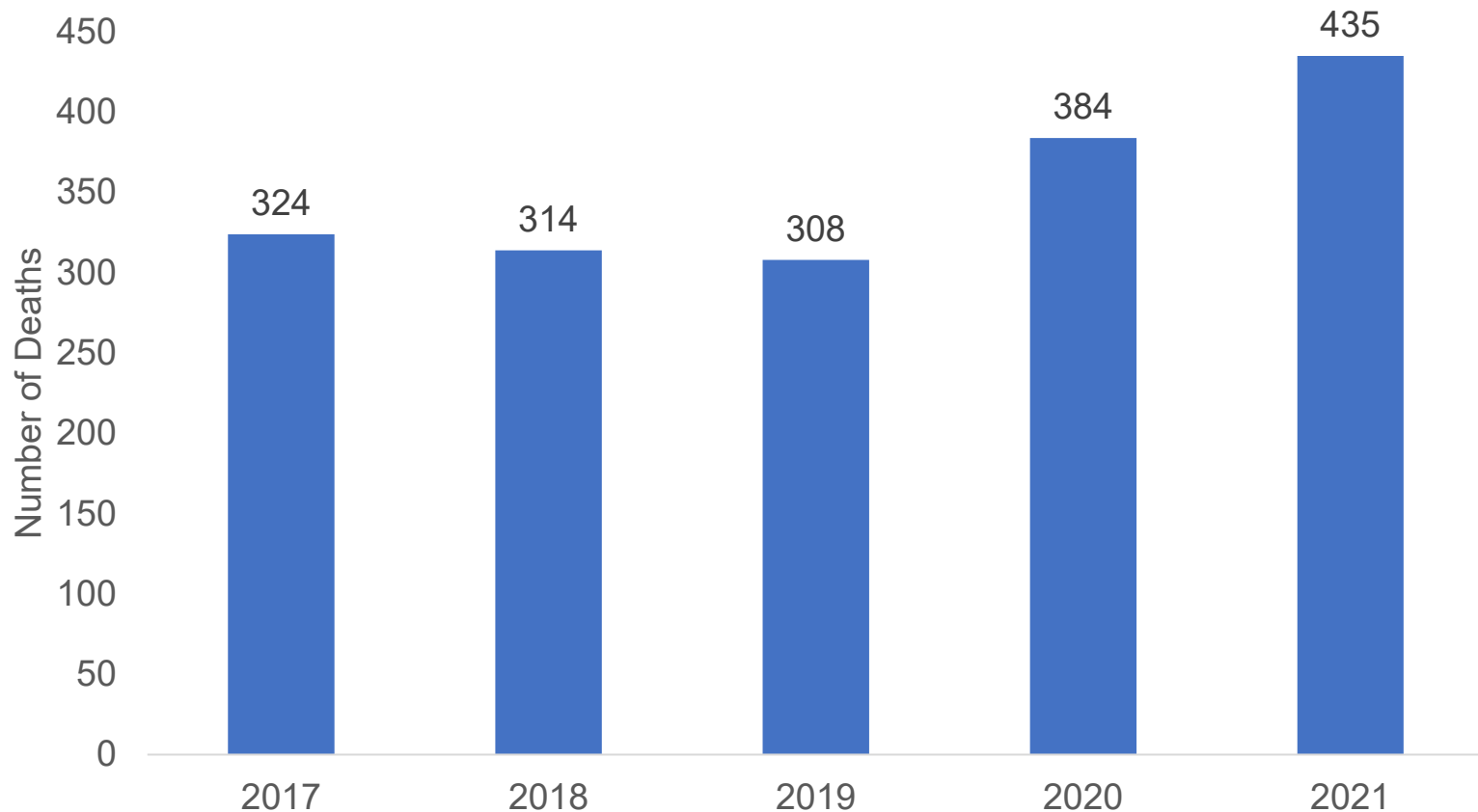
Four types of stigma (based on Pryor & Reeder, 2011).

Human Side of Overdose Prevention and Public Health

Different Perspectives



In 2021, fatal overdoses for which **any drug** contributed to cause of death were **13% higher** than in 2020.



Source: Office of the State Medical Examiners (OSME), Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH). Data updated as of June 14, 2022.

Note: Data reflect accidental drug overdose deaths and do not include suicides, homicides, or undetermined deaths.

Different Perspectives



Each number has a name and a face.

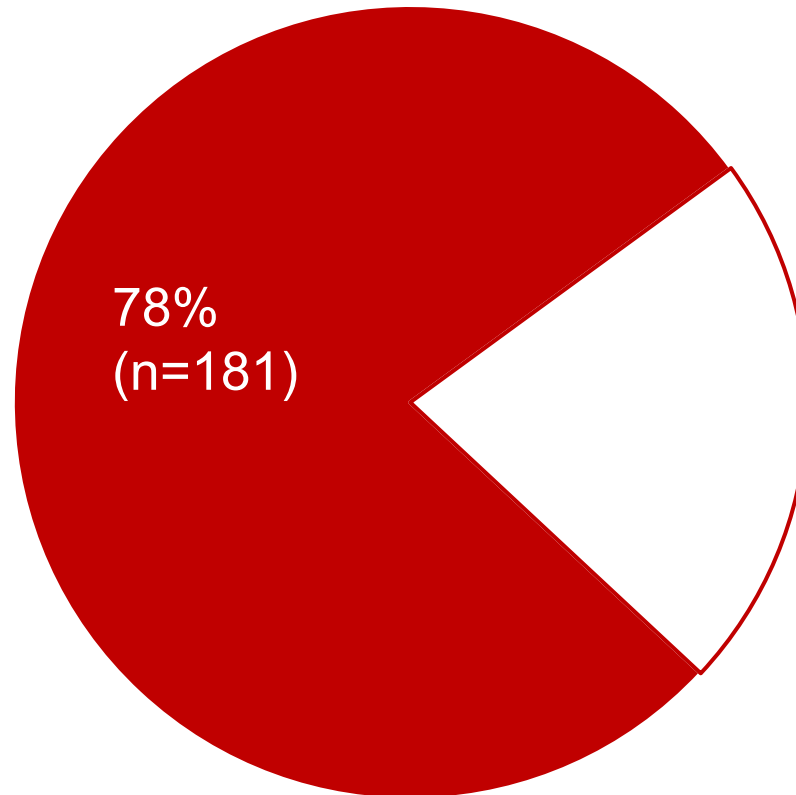
**A parent, a sibling, a child, a partner, a spouse, a friend, a neighbor,
a co-worker...**



Into Practice: Before



Of all cocaine-involved overdoses in 2021, about **4 out of 5 (78%)** were fentanyl related.



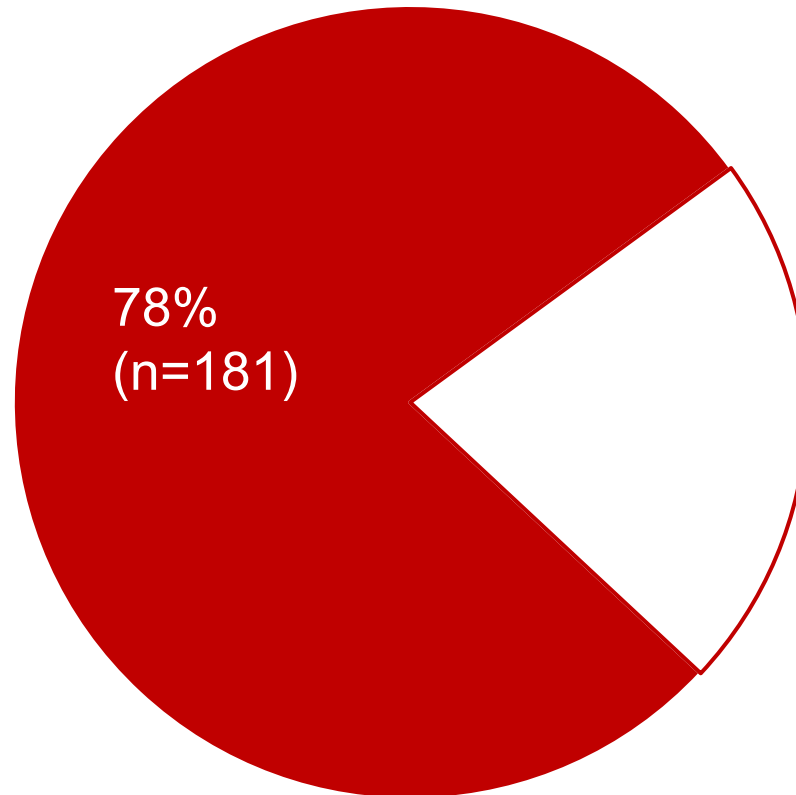
Source: Office of the State Medical Examiners (OSME), Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH). Data updated as of June 14, 2022.

Note: Data reflect accidental drug overdose deaths and do not include suicides, homicides, or undetermined deaths.

Into Practice: After



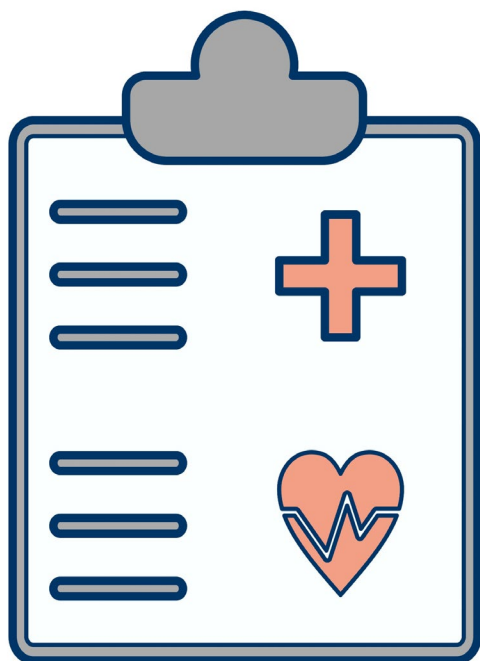
In 2021, about **4 out of 5 (78%)** people who died from a cocaine-involved overdose also had **fentanyl** in their system.



Source: Office of the State Medical Examiners (OSME), Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH). Data updated as of June 14, 2022.

Note: Data reflect accidental drug overdose deaths and do not include suicides, homicides, or undetermined deaths.

Charting Language: Before



*Ms. J is a 44-year-old female with a **long history of polysubstance abuse** with **poor compliance** with outpatient treatment and **little insight into her addiction** who presents **complaining of pain** and swelling in her right lower extremity. She also has a **history of drug-seeking behavior**. I suspect **this and homelessness** are the **primary reasons** for her visit (i.e., **secondary gain**).*

Charting Language: After



*Ms. J is a 44-year-old female with a **past medical history of substance use** who presents with pain and swelling in her right lower extremity. She has previously **been lost to follow-up** in outpatient treatment **possibly due to housing insecurity**.*

Words Matter

Stigma and Its Impact



The Real Stigma of Substance Use Disorders



In a study by the Recovery Research Institute, participants were asked how they felt about two people *"actively using drugs and alcohol."*

One person was referred to as a
"substance abuser"



The other person as
"having a substance use disorder"



No further information was given about these hypothetical individuals.

**THE STUDY DISCOVERED THAT PARTICIPANTS FELT THE
"SUBSTANCE ABUSER" WAS:**

- less likely to benefit from treatment
- more likely to benefit from punishment
- more likely to be socially threatening
- more likely to be blamed for their substance related difficulties and less likely that their problem was the result of an innate dysfunction over which they had no control
- they were more able to control their substance use without help

Perception versus Reality



- Language frames what the public thinks about substance use and recovery.
- Language negatively and positively impacts the way society perceives substance use.
- Language can depersonalize people.⁴

Moving Toward Recovery-Oriented Language



Stigmatizing



Recovery Oriented

- Clean
- Addict/Alcoholic
- Relapse Prevention
- Substance Abuse/Dependence
- Dirty/Clean Screen/Urine
- Illegal Drugs
- Crazy
- Diagnosis first

- In recovery
- Person in recovery
- Recovery Maintenance
- Substance Use
- Positive/Negative Screen
- Substances
- Sick/ill
- Person first

Breakout Group Discussions

Questions for Discussion



- 1) Share a time when you may have witnessed or engaged in behavior or language that was stigmatizing.

Example: You were with a friend or family member who made a comment about how a person who suffers from substance use disorder needs to “help themselves” or “did it to themselves.”

- 2) How was this perspective and language harmful?
- 3) In retrospect, what could you or a bystander have done differently?

Strategies to Reduce Stigma



GOOD NEWS!

WE CAN CHANGE OUR LANGUAGE.
THERE IS NO COST AND
THERE IS
NO DOWNSIDE!

SO ... HOW DO WE DO IT?

PUT THE PERSON FIRST.
A MEDICAL CONDITION
IS THE PROBLEM,
NOT THE PERSON.



You Can Make A Difference to Reduce Stigma



- **Correct negative language** that can cause stigma by sharing accurate information about addiction.
- **Speak out against negative behaviors and statements**, including those on social media.
- **Make sure the images used in communications show diverse communities** and do not reinforce stereotypes.

Questions?

Thank You!

References



1. World Health Organization. (2019, May 28). *Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases*.
<https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>
2. Mayo Clinic. (2021, June 05). *Job burnout: How to spot it and take action*.
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642>
3. Pryor and Reeder. (2011) *Four types of stigma*. HIV/AIDS in the Post-HAART Era: manifestations, treatment, and Epidemiology.
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4. Pescoscolido, B. A., Medina, T. R., Martin, J. K., & Long, J. S. (2013). The backbone of stigma: Identifying the global core of public prejudice associated with mental illness. *American Journal of Public Health* 103, 853-860.
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