

## What is Stigma?

- Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines stigma as: “a set of negative and unfair beliefs that a society or group have about something.”
- It is a metaphorical mark of shame society often assigns to people with certain traits



## Say this, not that!

### Instead of this...

“You’ve been drinking a lot lately. Why can’t you just stop? You know I’m concerned.”

### Say this...

“I notice you’re drinking more than usual. Have you noticed the change or do you have any concerns? If so, is there anything I can do to help?”

“Do you know what to do if you see an overdose?”

“Do you know how to help a person who’s suffered an overdose?”

## How to intervene when confronted with stigma

### When you hear...

“When I see those addicts downtown, I can’t imagine why they don’t do something about their lives. You’d think they’d show a little self-respect; it’s disgusting how they choose to live.”

### You could say...

“What someone suggested to me was to imagine a child in front of me who had done their very best. Then ask myself what problems they must have encountered as they grew up, and be dealing with today, to be suffering so much. Once I started doing that, it struck me that they must be leading a life they never imagined. I wonder if there is something we can do to help? At the very least, we can offer our respect for their humanity and use person-first language.”

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# LANGUAGE MATTERS

- STIGMA AWARENESS -





## Language Matters!

### Promotes Stigma

- Addiction/Substance Abuse
- Addicts
- Junkies
- “Crackhead/Methhead”
- Person is “clean”

### Promotes Inclusion

- Substance (drug) use
- People who use drugs
- People with Substance Use Disorder
- Person who uses crack/cocaine or methamphetamine
- Person is in recovery

# Understanding Stigma

## Beliefs Perpetuate Stigma

- Substance use is a “moral failure” vs. an illness requiring health care
- Those who use substances are to blame for their condition
- People who use substances could “choose to stop” if they really wanted to stop
- People who use substances are reckless or dangerous

## Types of Stigma

### Social Identity

Racism  
Sexual Orientation  
Gender Identity  
Ageism  
Sexism

### Health-Related

Substance Use Disorder  
Mental Health Disorders  
HIV  
Hepatitis C

## Experiences with Stigma

- Unfair treatment – felt and anticipated
- Internalized stigma – shame, embarrassment, self-esteem
- Secondary stigma – experienced by family, friends, caregivers and those in active recovery

## Impact of Stigma - Harmful to All

- Perpetuates secrets and promotes concealment of the problem
- Discourages the use of much needed health and social services
- Increased risk of homelessness
- Leads to harmful coping – isolation, social withdrawal, increase in substance use and other harmful behaviours such as needle sharing
- Limits access to positive opportunities: education, employment, etc.
- **Poor health outcomes – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual (hope, purpose, meaning, and belonging)**

