



# Mental Health Stigma

## Stigma

A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person: the stigma of mental disorder.

## Possible Educational Implications

Harmful effects of stigma may include:

- Trying to pretend nothing is wrong
- Refusal to seek treatment
- Rejection by family and friends
- School problems and discrimination
- Difficulty with peers
- Being subjected to physical violence or harassment
- Not being offered the same opportunities as their peers

Watch for:

- Increased isolation and shame
- Bullying or dismissive behaviors
- Poor self-esteem
- Self-medication through substance use

\*Behavioral health refers to mental health and substance use disorders

## Information for Parents, Teachers & Youth

All mental health concerns are treatable and more treatment progress can be made by a coordinated partnership between schools and home. It is recommended that with family consent, all community partners work together and with the family.

Someone who is experiencing mental health challenges is usually able to live a fulfilling life, particularly if they are receiving help to manage their illness.

It is not uncommon for stigma to be attached to mental health challenges. This causes people to feel embarrassed. Often, people with mental health challenges worry that they will be teased or treated differently.

Stigma commonly involves the use of stereotypes and labels to describe a person. Stereotypes are often attached to people who are suffering from a mental illness.

Support from family, school, friends, and peers can be an important part of recovery. With sensitivity, support, and help from mental health professionals, a child can lead a healthy and productive life.

### Signs of Stigma

Stigma may be obvious and direct, such as someone making a negative remark about a mental health condition or assuming that someone would be dangerous because of a mental health diagnosis. These and other forms of stigma can lead to feelings of anger, frustration, shame, and low self-esteem.

Stigma may be more subtle, including:

- Discrimination at work, school, and in other areas of life
- Rejection by family and friends
- Jokes and humor making fun of persons with mental illness or disabilities
- Other assumptions about the limitations of persons with mental illness
- Isolating or harassment by peers

### Benefits of early intervention

Standing up to derogatory comments, providing information and education to persons unfamiliar with mental health concerns and offering support to students with challenges will model a positive response and send a message of tolerance.

This fact sheet must not be used for the purpose of making a diagnosis. It is to be used only as a reference for your own understanding and to provide information about the different kinds of behaviors and mental health issues you may encounter in your classroom.

Adapted from the document published by the Colorado Department of Education's "Building Bridges" Grant with funding from the U.S. Department of Education Additional Building Bridges project information available at [www.csi-policy.org/buildingbridges/index.html](http://www.csi-policy.org/buildingbridges/index.html)



### Pro-Active Instructional Strategies and Classroom Accommodations

Discrimination against students because of a mental health condition is against the law, and educators are required provide accommodations as needed. Source: [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)

#### DO

- Use respectful language.
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations.
- Invite a school mental health professional to educate students and dispel myths.
- Challenge any disrespectful terms used in referring to people with a mental illness or related words used as terms of derision, such as psycho or lunatic.
- Refer first to a person, not their illness – use phrases such as “a person with schizophrenia” rather than labels like “a schizophrenic.”
- Challenge any myths or misconceptions about mental illness, such as links to violence or misunderstanding about the behavior of those who are unwell.
- Include mental illness in discussions about acceptance of diversity, just as you would discuss cultural diversity, religious beliefs and physical disabilities.
- Invite a health professional or a person who has had mental illness to talk to students about mental health issues, stigma and the community.
- Include some mental health services or support groups among the local agencies where your school does community work.
- Be discreet when a student needs to leave for a counseling appointment.
- Encourage parents to support their children in extracurricular activities and interactions with others.

#### DON'T

- Portray successful persons with disabilities as super human.
- Use generic labels, such as retarded.
- Use terms like crazy, lunatic, manic depressive, retarded, or slow-functioning.
- Call a student out in front of class for an appointment with the counselor.

Stigma combined with adultism may limit opportunities and increase feelings of loneliness and shame. Adultism is discrimination against young people. It happens anytime children or youth are ignored, silenced, neglected or punished because they are not adults ([www.freechild.org](http://www.freechild.org)).

### Additional Resources

**Anti-Stigma Project**, <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/stigma.htm> 410-646-0262, 800-704-0262

**Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health of South Carolina**, [www.fedfamsc.org](http://www.fedfamsc.org)

**FreeChild Project**, [www.freechild.org](http://www.freechild.org)  
Resources to develop youth leaders and articles

**Mayo Clinic: Steps to cope with stigma**, [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)

**National Institute on Drug Abuse**, <http://teens.drugabuse.gov/facts/index.php>

**National Institute on Mental Health**, [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

**Response Ability**, [www.responseability.org](http://www.responseability.org)  
Information, fact sheets, resources

**SAMHSA'S National Mental Health Information Center**, [www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov)  
800-789-2647

**South Carolina Anti-Bullying Laws & Policies**, <http://www.stopbullying.gov/laws/south-carolina.html>

**Youth M.O.V.E. South Carolina**, [www.fedfamsc.org/youth](http://www.fedfamsc.org/youth)  
[www.facebook.com/YouthMoveSC](https://www.facebook.com/YouthMoveSC)