

# Stigma Busters



*How we can reduce mental health and substance use stigma and discrimination with our patients and colleagues?*

## **1. KNOW YOUR FACTS.... about mental health and substance use disorders.**

- Educate yourself about these. Learn to discern facts from myths.
- Consider visiting the following websites:
  - ✓ <http://tinyurl.com/ASAM-Article>
  - ✓ <http://tinyurl.com/NAMI-StigmaBlog>

## **2. BE SENSITIVE... our bias and attitudes influence our words and behavior.**

- We all grow up with certain prejudices and judgmental thinking.
- We can change our prejudices with awareness and knowledge.
- See the people you serve as unique human beings, not as labels or stereotypes.
- See the whole person and not just their mental illness or substance use; they have many other personal attributes that do not disappear just because they also have these disorders.

## **3. WORDS HAVE POWER... choose them carefully and avoid labels.**

- The way we speak to and about others can affect the way other people think and speak.
- Don't use hurtful, derogatory, or judgmental language such as:
  - ✓ addict
  - ✓ crackhead
  - ✓ junkie
  - ✓ nutty person
  - ✓ druggie
  - ✓ crazy person

## **4. USE "PERSON FIRST" LANGUAGE... remember that I am not my illness.**

- Using person first language in speech and writing, such as:
  - ✓ a person who uses drugs
  - ✓ a person with depression
- This demonstrates that you are not defining a person by their drug use or mental health issue. It reminds us and others to see the whole person and not just the disease/illness.

## **5. EDUCATION HELPS ALL OF US... use your knowledge and skills to educate others.**

- Find opportunities to pass on facts and positive attitudes about people with mental health and substance use problems.
- If your friends, family, co-workers, or even the media present information that is not true, challenge those myths and stereotypes.
- Let others know how their negative words and incorrect descriptions affect people with behavioral health problems and can keep people from getting the help they need.

## **6. BE POSITIVE... seek strength and offer hope.**

- People with mental health and substance use problems make valuable contributions to their homes, communities, and society.
- Their health problems are just one part of who they are.
- Divert focus away from the negative stories. Recognize, applaud, and share the positive stories.
- Help those with the problems see their strengths and gifts.

## **7. SUPPORT PEOPLE... these problems cannot be solved in isolation.**

- Treat people who have mental health or substance use problems with dignity and respect.
- Think about how you'd like others to act toward you if you were in the same situation.
- If you have family members, friends, or co-workers with substance use or mental health problems, support their choices and encourage their efforts to get well.

## **8. BE INCLUSIVE... and advocate for inclusion.**

- People with mental health and substance use problems have a right to take an equal part in society. Let's use our roles and skills to make sure that happens.
- It is against the law and violates human rights to deny people access to things such as jobs, housing and health care - which the rest of us may take for granted.

## **9. BE TRAUMA INFORMED... understand that substance misuse and mental health challenges are often linked to trauma of many types.**

- Seek out and utilize trauma informed models of care.
- Learn how your practice environment or your protocols for admission, treatment, and discharge may re-traumatize or trigger someone with a history of trauma.
- Educate yourself and others about the types of trauma.

## **10. EMBRACE CHANGE... and incorporate current best practices.**

- Be aware of new treatment options such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) and utilizing the skills of peer recovery specialists.
- Don't forget about non-pharmacological interventions such as:
  - ✓ art and music therapies
  - ✓ meditation
  - ✓ yoga
  - ✓ aromatherapy
  - ✓ mindfulness
  - ✓ acupuncture / acupressure