

MODULE 1

Activity #1 Stigma Handout

Defining Stigma

The following are definitions of “stigma” taken from different sources and from different historical periods:



A mark or sign of disgrace or discredit; a visible sign or characteristic of disease.
- *The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990*

An attribute which is deeply discrediting.
- *Goffman, E. Stigma: The management of Spoiled Identity. 1963*

A distinguishing mark or characteristic of a bad or objectionable kind; a sign of some specific disorder, as hysteria; a mark made upon the skin by burning with a hot iron, as a token of infamy or subjection; a brand; a mark of disgrace or infamy; a sign of severe censure or condemnation, regarded as impressed on a person or thing.
- *The Shorter Oxford Dictionary, Fourth Edition, 1993*



The Stigma of Mental Illness

“Stigma refers to a cluster of negative attitudes and beliefs that motivate the general public to fear, reject, avoid and discriminate against people with mental illnesses. Stigma is not just a matter of using the wrong word or action. Stigma is about disrespect. It is the use of negative labels to identify a person living with mental illness. Stigma is a barrier. Fear of stigma and the resulting discrimination discourages individuals and their families from getting the help they need.” (SAMHSA 2004)

Terms Related to Stigma

Stereotype:

“a person or thing that conforms to an unjustly fixed impression or attitude”

Stereotypes are the attitudes about a group of people (e.g. “All people with mental illness are dangerous.”)

Prejudice:

“A preconceived opinion”

Prejudice is agreeing with the stereotypes (e.g. “I think people with mental illness are dangerous”) without knowing or understanding, literally pre-judging.

Discrimination:

“unfavourable treatment based on prejudice”

Discrimination is a behaviour that may result from stigma (e.g. “I don’t want people with mental illness around me, therefore I discriminate against them by not hiring them, not being friends with them, etc.”)

- *The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990*

* This activity has been adapted from “Talking About Mental Illness, CAMH 2001