



Individual

Self Stigma

DISABILITY SERVICES

RESOURCE CARD #4

When we experience discrimination it is hard not to take it on board, sometimes the stigma that comes from society can create an internalised stigma within ourselves. If we are told we are worthless by society then it is only a matter of time before we start to feel worthless.

Stigma within society can come in many different forms, but usually through stigmatised attitudes and stereotyping or labelling. Social Stigma is often apparent when individuals or certain minority groups are excluded or treated differently to 'the norm'; this is a form of discrimination which robs people of their rightful opportunities, such as employment, housing, health-care etc. Discrimination **is not OK**; it is a breach of the human rights act. If you feel you have been discriminated against it is important that you discuss it with someone you trust.

If for example someone is labelled 'crazy' by society and treated differently because of mental illness then they can come to see this not as one feature of their lives, but as a defining aspect of their core identity. They see themselves as their mental illness and not as a person with a mental illness, or as someone who is disabled and not a person with a disability.

Self stigma is an internalised stigma that eats away at our self esteem and self efficacy.

It is like a voice inside our head that tells us that we aren't good enough. Feelings of shame and the guilt often come with self stigma, when we are lead to believe that we have broken some unwritten code about what it means to be a full member of society.

When experiencing self stigma we sometimes adopt an attitude of 'why try?', this is usually because the experience of social stigma was so hurtful that we try to protect ourselves by anticipating failure. It is important to recognise the crucial part you play in determining your own success or failure, the 'will do' attitude beats the 'why try' attitude every time.



What happens when self stigma rules?

- ⊕ We set ourselves unrealistic expectations.
- ⊕ We feel shame and guilt.
- ⊕ We let our inhibitions take control.
- ⊕ We resort to avoidance tactics.
- ⊕ We lose confidence and motivation.
- ⊕ We start to withdraw from others.
- ⊕ We become isolated and lonely.

Ways to challenge self stigma?

- ⊕ Identify people who are positive and supportive in your life and spend more time with them.
- ⊕ Take less notice of those who run you down.
- ⊕ Make an effort to notice and value your strengths.
- ⊕ Do things that help you feel good about yourself.
- ⊕ Notice your negative internal voice or feelings and challenge

them with positive ones.

- ⊕ Voice your positive feelings. E.g. "I am a worthwhile person!"
- ⊕ Further educate yourself about self stigma. "Education is argued to be helpful in reducing as well as preventing, self stigma" (Watson and Corrigan 2001).

There are many people and organisations that embrace equality and inclusion. Here at Disability Services we celebrate diversity.

Did you know that in India they practise the act of laughing together in ceremony so that they are happier!

A good resource produced by the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand: <http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/file/downloads/pdf/Fighting-Shadows.pdf>

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

This resource was produced by Disability Services at Victoria University of Wellington to provide self-help information and guidance for tertiary students.

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GLOSSARY:

Social Stigma

Social stigma is severe social disapproval of personal characteristics or beliefs that are against cultural norms.

Stigmatise

To accuse or condemn or openly or formally or brand as disgraceful.

Discrimination

Treatment or consideration of, or making a distinction in favour of or against, a person or thing based on the group, class, or category to which that person or thing belongs rather than on individual merit.

Stereotype

Is a generalized perception of first impressions: behaviors presumed by a group of people judging with the eyes/criticizing ones outer appearance (or a population in general) to be associated with another specific group.

Self Esteem

Our individual sense of self worth.

Self Efficacy

An individuals ability to set and reach a goal.