

# Stigma Handout

**HIV** -Spread solidarity and love, not stigma and fear

**Stigma**-When you or someone else thinks negative thoughts about me or blame me because I have HIV. (E.g., "You should have been more careful. You brought this on yourself") You are dangerous, you are exactly the type of person that gets HIV. It serves you right)

**Discrimination** -When someone else does negative things to me because I have or might have contracted HIV. (E.g., 'Refuse to serve me food, fire me from my job')

**Self-Stigma/ internal Stigma**-When I start to think or say negative things about myself, or do negative things to myself, because I have HIV. (I deserve this, it's my fault., I should have been more careful; people won't want to see me; people will blame me; I'm not clean...)

**Stigma, including self-stigma and negatively impact your quality of life** -Stigma is caused by fear and ignorance that can lead to discrimination, shame, guilt, self-loathing and self-rejection and even suicide. We know the stigma virus well from HIV, tuberculosis, mental health and from our work with marginalised groups in society. We recognise that stigma and self-stigma is an important factor in many instances of depression, addiction, and overweight.

It's pervasive. It's also universal

**Stigma and self-stigma can lead to:**

- People not asking about HIV testing or seeking care they need
- People hiding their illness for fear of discrimination and judgement
- Deepening isolation and depression
- Low quality of life
- Low self-esteem
- Anger and resentment

**How you speak, how you share on social media, and what you share, matters**

- Talk about HIV and use terms like 'overcoming', 'understanding', 'building resilience to cope', 'learning from', not phrases like 'death sentence', 'infected' – your words matter
- Talk about people who have HIV as people who are living with HIV don't call them cases or victims, they are people
- Talk about people contracting HIV, but not people infecting others, transmitting, or spreading the virus – people are not intentionally 'infecting' others, there is no blame here
- Share accurate information but don't share rumours, repeat scary stories or use language that causes fear
- Talk about what is happening, what people can do to support themselves and others, remind people of the services that can help
- If you are HIV, know that it does not define you as a person.

- **Be compassionate and kind**, anything else hurts you. Put yourself in the shoes of the person, their family, their friends and just think about what you would want for yourself, or people close to you.
- **Don't take it personally** - if you have HIV - they are not about YOU they are about the VIRUS
- **Don't distance or disparage on your social media** – but reach out, and share the positive and inspiring and see yourself as someone who coped well, worked to help others, to be compassionate and kind, and see how you contributed in alleviating the stigma and fear of living with HIV.

**Reference** <http://www.beyondstigma.org/>