COVID-19: 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 COVID-19

You should have been more careful. You brought this on yourself.

You are dangerous, you are exactly the type of person that gets COVID-19. It serves you right.

Discrimination

When someone else does negative things to me because I have or might have contracted COVID-19

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 COVID-19

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 is like a deadly virus and it can kill.**

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.**

![Icons representing support and care](image)

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

- People not asking about COVID 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 COVID-19 but don’t attach ethnicity and locations to the disease
- Talk about people who have it, people who have died from COVID-19 – don’t call them cases or victims – they are people
- Talk about people contracting COVID-19, but not people infecting others, transmitting or spreading the disease – 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 measures that can help – handwashing, social distancing.
- If you have or have had COVID-19, that is exactly it – you ARE NOT COVID-19, you HAVE/HAD COVID-19. 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 COVID-19 and are self-isolating within your home, people staying away from you, cleaning surfaces that you touch etc are measures to protect others in the household - 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
When this is all over, do you want to look back and see yourself as someone who coped well, worked to help others, to be compassionate and kind, or do you want to look back and see how you contributed to the suffering by spreading fear and stigma?

We all have a choice – what do you chose?

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www.beyondstigma.org