

## Activity 7 - Understanding stigma

Many people with mental health conditions say that the stigma that surrounds mental health is harder to live with than the condition itself. Stigma results in discriminatory or negative behaviour and treatment towards people and the fear of stigma often prevents people from seeking help and treatment.

Stigma is frequently perpetuated through mistaken beliefs about mental health, and can be seen in people's attitudes, in public policy, in the media, etc. We can all work together to reduce stigma by providing accurate information about mental health conditions and their treatment.

### Aims

- To demonstrate how stigma acts as a barrier to people seeking help for mental health problems and mental health conditions
- To show that people's attitudes about mental health can be positively influenced by exposure to accurate information
- To explore the meaning of the term stigma and the relationship between attitudes (beliefs) and discriminatory treatment (behaviour and actions)

### Step 1: Defining stigma and discrimination

**Stigma** is about disrespect. It's the use of negative words to identify a person. It stops people from getting the help they need due to the fear of being discriminated against. **Discrimination** is the unfair treatment of one person or a group of people.

- Split the students up into groups and ask if they know what the word 'stigma' means and write this on a flipchart
- Bring the groups back together and lead the discussion of the definition of stigma, and the relationship between stigma, stereotyping and discrimination



### Materials needed:

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Flipchart

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Pens

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Post-it notes



## MODULE 2: MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

Here are some questions that will help you to guide the conversation. Encourage students to share language they have heard others using – they don't have to agree with the statements.

- What are some of the negative things you have heard about people with mental health conditions? (Responses may include: Violent; crazy)
- Why do you think people with mental health conditions are stigmatised? (Possible answers include: They are weird/different; people don't really know the facts)
- Can you think of any other health conditions or social issues that have been stigmatised throughout history? (Possible answers include: Homosexuality; HIV; divorce)
- What kinds of factors have contributed to changing public attitudes around some of these conditions or issues? (Possible answers include: Education; research; legislation)
- What do you think influences perceptions about mental health? (Possible answers include: The media – films, news, newspaper headlines and stories that associate people with violence)
- How do you think stigma affects the lives of people with mental health conditions? (Possible answers include: People decide not to get help and treatment even though they could benefit from it; it makes them unhappy; they may not be able to get a job or find housing)

### Step 2: Review

- Are participants surprised how different issues have been stigmatised throughout history?
- Has this made participants think differently about any of the attitudes they have or language they use?

