

SOCIAL STIGMA AND THE STIGMA-FREE TOOL



Grades 9 Social Studies, English Language Arts Social Stigma and the Stigma-Free Tool

Purpose of the Lesson:

According to YourDictionary, social stigma is defined as “a severe social disapproval with a person on the grounds of a particular characteristic which distinguishes them from others in society, e.g. mental illness or physical disability”. Social stigma can have serious implications when it comes to individuals seeking support for their mental health challenges or mental illness. Understanding what social stigma is, what stigmatizing language looks like and ways to reduce stigma can change this dynamic in powerful ways. This lesson is intended to do all of this for your students! They will first learn about what social stigma is. Then they will discuss what stigmatizing language looks like and what the implications of this language are for people with mental illnesses. Finally, they will use the Stigma-Free Society’s Stigma-Free Tool to learn about their potential biases and work on living a more Stigma-Free life.

Curriculum Competencies:

Social Studies

- Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups affect events, decisions, or developments (cause and consequence)
- Explain and infer different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events by considering prevailing norms, values, worldviews, and beliefs (perspective)
- Recognize implicit and explicit ethical judgments in a variety of sources (ethical judgment)
- Make reasoned ethical judgments about actions in the past and present, and determine appropriate ways to remember and respond (ethical judgment)

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English Language Arts

- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts
- Recognize how language constructs personal, social, and cultural identity
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking

First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

Video

Reducing Stigma - Have That Talk

Guiding Questions:

- Based on this video, why does stigma exist in our society around mental illness?
- What are some of the ways social stigma impacts people with mental illness?
- Aside from mental illness, what are other examples of things that are stigmatized?
- How can language contribute to stigma?

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Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Preparation: Queue up video/set up projector

- 1. Have the students watch the video "Reducing Stigma"** This can be found [HERE](#).
- 2. Pose the guiding questions found above to your class after watching the video.**
- 3. Share this definition of self-stigma with your class:** "A severe social disapproval with a person on the grounds of a particular characteristic which distinguishes them from others in society, e.g. mental illness or physical disability" ([YourDictionary](#)). Ask your students to reflect on what this definition means. Focus on specific words within this definition, such as "severe", "disapproval", "other". Discuss what emotions these words elicit in your students. Have them reflect on what social stigma might feel like for someone experiencing it based on the emotions this definition evokes.
- 4. Have your students reflect on the concept of social stigma by coming up with examples.** To help them conceptualize social stigma a little more deeply, get your students to brainstorm some examples of what social stigma can look like. To get them started, you can use the example of someone being excluded from a social situation because they aren't dressed in a way that is perceived as being cool. This is an example of social stigma based on socioeconomic status.
- 5. Discuss with your students that words carry a lot of weight when it comes to stigma.** As the video suggests, certain language we have adopted into our everyday vernacular can contribute to the stigma that exists around mental illness. Have your students brainstorm some of these words. For example, "crazy", "psycho", etc. They can do this brainstorming activity as a whole class or in partners or small groups. Once they have completed the brainstorm, discuss with them why these words can have negative implications for individuals with mental illnesses and how using these words can contribute to the social stigma that exists surrounding mental illness.

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6. Have your students use our Stigma-Free Tool. Found [HERE](#), our Stigma-Free Tool is a simple and engaging way to assess your attitudes around stigma privately, and see where you may want to improve your actions and thoughts around the topic of stigma. Have each student use the tool to assess their own potential biases and stigmatizing beliefs.

Accommodations/modifications: For students who are visually impaired, you can read out the questions to them or use the text-to-speech function on your computer or tablet.

7. Follow-up Activity. Once your students have used our Stigma-Free Tool, you can encourage them to take the [Stigma-Free Pledge](#). This pledge is a way for them to indicate that they are committing to living a more Stigma-Free life! This is a way for your students to put words into action when it comes to reducing stigma around mental illness/mental health, and stigma in general.

8. Lesson Closure. Use some time at the end of this lesson to reflect on what your students have learned and what they plan to do differently now that they understand the implications of social stigma. Share with them that stigma can greatly impact people's experiences and self perceptions. When we work towards living a Stigma-Free life, we are committing to ensuring that we are not contributing to these negative experiences in any way.