



KCA TOOL BOX TALK: Stigma

If we want to make an impact on the problem of the opioid epidemic in a meaningful way, as well as all other substance abuse epidemics, we **MUST** address stigma.

8 steps individuals and organizations can take to reduce stigma:

1. Start by understanding your own potential biases, your organization's biases, and ways that you may internally or externally shame individuals with substance disorders or their families.
2. Create a media campaign using messages of hope and faith. The above message "prevention is best, treatment is effective, and people do recover" is a good example of this type of messaging. Use this messaging on created materials, on social media posts, in presentations, and in conversations.
3. Change your words. Words are powerful. Labels like "addict" are harmful – a person with an addiction is a person with a substance use disorder. We do not call a person with cancer, a cancer. We can clearly see the negative impact this would have on morale and hope, and even on recovery-based behaviors (such as seeking treatment).
4. Share stories of recovery. They are powerful, and remind people that recovery is an expected outcome of treatment.
5. Share stories of how compassion helped support a person's journey to recovery. They are equally powerful. We hear many stories about the destruction of families, communities, relationships, lives. This can help with a call to action, but if not balanced with a message of hope will inadvertently add to the problem of stigma.
6. Share information on *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's)*, how common they are, and their relationship to addiction.
7. Stick to the facts. Facts are powerful when challenging biases and fear-based stigma. It is hard to argue with cold, hard, facts. Fortunately, the "cold, hard, facts" support interventions such as motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral therapies, family-based interventions, finding meaning, faith, and purpose, and medication assisted treatment. There is no evidence that supports confrontation or shaming as effective in helping people recover.
8. Support access to treatment. Know where to go to ask for help. Share resources. Give assistance. Sometimes the opportunity to help someone find help is brief. Be ready.

Find more information at www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Signatures

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Teamwork Improves Safety!