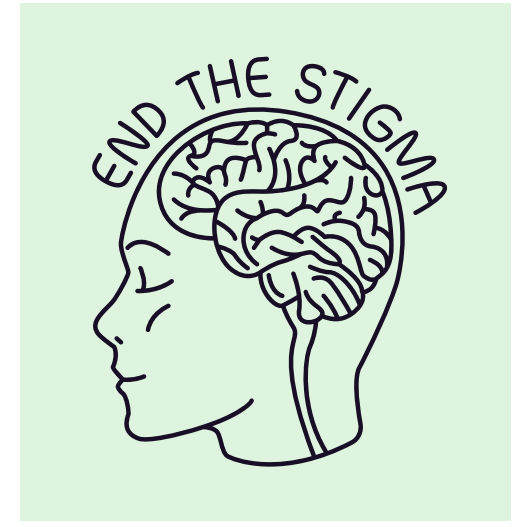


# Stigma

"**Stigma** is when someone sees a person or group of people in a negative way because of a perceived characteristic or shared attribute" (CCSA, 2022).

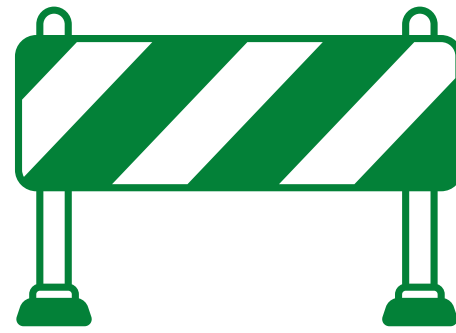
People who use substances or have lived experience of using substances are often stigmatized.

Youth learn from everyone around them, including teachers, family, and peers. You can set an example by modelling non-stigmatizing and inclusive language.

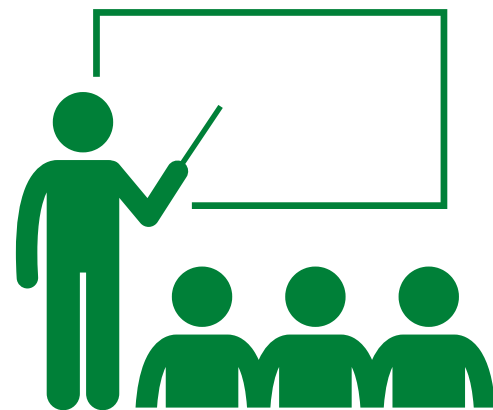


## Impacts of Stigma

**Stigma** is a barrier to asking for help. Youth may fear being **shamed** or **judged**, which may lead them to **isolate** themselves.



**Stigma** may make youth feel **uncomfortable** engaging in classroom discussions or speaking to adults worrying what others may think.



**Stigma** may cause youth to conceal their substance use or use alone. This can increase their risk of drug poisoning or prevent them from seeking help.



## Forms of Stigma

1

### Structural Stigma

Occurs when society devalues people who are part of a certain group.



This causes inequalities, including a lack of educational opportunities or they may not be taken seriously when seeking help.

2

### Social Stigma

Occurs during interactions with others. This includes using negative attitudes and negative language.



It can lead to negative attitudes, behaviours, and lead to discrimination.

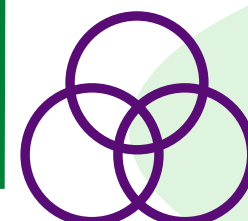
3

### Self-Stigma

Occurs when a person believes the negative things said about them.



Fitting in with their peers is extremely important to youth. Internalizing negative beliefs can have a lasting impact.



**Intersectional Stigma is an overlap of these, and happens when a person experiences stigma for multiple reasons.**

## Spectrum of Substance Use Health

**Non-Use**  
(Abstinence)

**Beneficial Use**

**Lower-Risk Use**

**Higher-Risk Use**

**Addiction**  
(Substance Use Disorder)

Substance use can be seen on a spectrum. Individuals may move back and forth along the spectrum in their lifetime.



Learn more about the Substance Use Spectrum:

[decyde.ca/substance-use-spectrum-2/](https://decyde.ca/substance-use-spectrum-2/)

# How educators can help decrease stigma

## 1

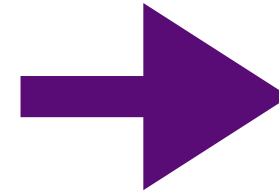
### Use Person-First Language

When talking about substance use, the language we use **matters**.

Children and youth learn from those around them, including from teachers.



You can set a positive example by modelling non-stigmatizing language and being inclusive.



### Examples of person-first language

- Instead of "drug user", say **"someone who uses substances"**
- Instead of "relapse", say **"recurrence of use"**.
- Instead of "addict" say, **"person with a substance use disorder"**.
- Avoid victim-blaming stereotypes, such as "lazy, weak"
- Avoid negative labels such as "drug addict" and "pot head"

## 2

### Support Your Students

Actively discuss substance use in the classroom, these open conversations will help students feel more comfortable engaging in discussions.

Remember, approx. 1 in 5 students will go home to a family that may use. Be mindful of this, and the realities children face.



You can refer them to the guidance counsellor or other support if they express concerns.

### Did you know?

**Substance use disorder is a medical condition that can be treated. Ongoing use of substances can affect the developing brain, such as the ability to make decisions and control impulses.**

**Some people view substance use as a choice. This stigmatizing view does not reduce substance use and can be harmful to the individual.**

## 3

### Foster Self-Care and Self-Acceptance

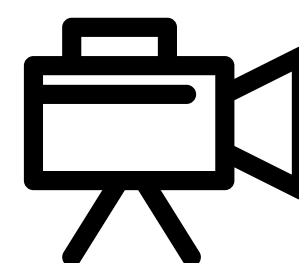
Discuss the importance of self-care and display self-care activities within the classroom.

This could include taking your students for a walk, or spending a few minutes on mindfulness activities.



Building their self-care and self-acceptance may help them to feel more confident in reaching out for help.

### To learn more about stigma



Watch this video on stigma from the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWiuVHEdK0w>

For more information visit us at:

[www.decayde.ca](http://www.decayde.ca)

#### References

1. Get sensible. (2021). The Guiding Principals of Education. <https://getsensible.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Sensible-Cannabis-Education-Booklet-1.pdf>
2. Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. (2022). Understanding Substance Use. Educators Guide. <https://ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2022-09/Understanding-Substance-Use-Educators-Guide-en.pdf>
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