

# Breaking Barriers, Busting Stigma: Stigma and Discrimination

## STIGMA

Stigma (noun): a set of negative and unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something.<sup>1</sup>

When evaluating this word in relation to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), research shows that individuals may encounter various forms of stigma. Including but not limited to: *public stigma, self-stigma, courtesy stigma and affiliate stigma.*<sup>2</sup>

## TYPES OF STIGMA

**Public Stigma:** As suggested by its name, public stigma encompasses biased, discriminatory, and stereotypical attitudes and actions directed at individuals with IDD from the broader society.<sup>2</sup>

**Self-Stigma:** Self-Stigma may occur when individuals with IDD adopt the negative perceptions and behaviors that have been directed at them, causing them to perceive themselves as de-valued.<sup>2</sup>

**Courtesy Stigma/Affiliate Stigma:** This type of stigma refers to the bias or discrimination faced by individuals connected to someone with IDD (i.e. family or friends). Additionally, affiliate stigma arises when these individuals internalize these negative characteristics and support the prevailing stereotypes present in society.<sup>2</sup>

## THE IMPACT

According to the Association for Psychological Science feature, *“One of Us: Combating Stigma Against People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities,”* stigma leads to a multitude of adverse effects.<sup>3</sup>

**For example:**

- Perceptions or encounters of discrimination trigger increased stress reactions. Furthermore, persistent exposure results in chronic stress, thus causing premature physical decline.
- Stigma can lead to maladaptive coping behaviors (e.g., substance use and disordered eating).
- As it relates to healthcare, misinformation and bias among physicians significantly contributes to stigma and serves as a major factor in health disparities.

## ADDRESSING STIGMA

We all have the ability to help combat the stigma surrounding Individuals with IDD.

**This may include but is not limited to:**

- **Education and Awareness:** For example, sharing accurate information about IDD to bust myths and misconceptions.
- **Language:** It is imperative that we use respectful and inclusive language. The Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD) has a resource highlighting this. It can be found on their website ([tcdd.texas.gov/resources/developmental-disabilities-101/](https://tcdd.texas.gov/resources/developmental-disabilities-101/)).<sup>4</sup>
- **Advocacy:** Championing the rights and inclusion of individuals with IDD at the Texas Legislature. Engage with your State Senator and State Representative to emphasize the significance of ensuring fair access to services, supports, and accommodations.
  - For more information on disability policy/advocacy check out the following organizations: Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities, The Arc of Texas, Coalition of Texans with Disabilities and Disability Rights Texas.

1. Dictionary, dictionary.com

2. “Stigma, Acceptance and Belonging for People with Idd across Cultures.” Current

Developmental Disorders Reports, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2020, ncbi.nlm.nih.gov.

3. “One of Us: Combating Stigma against People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.”

Association for Psychological Science, psychologicalscience.org

4. TCDD | DD 101, [tcdd.texas.gov/resources/developmental-disabilities-101/](https://tcdd.texas.gov/resources/developmental-disabilities-101/)