

WHAT IS STIGMA?



Stigma is a social process linked to power and control which leads to creating stereotypes and assigning labels to those that are considered deviate from the norm or behave "badly" -- stigma creates the social conditions that makes people who use drugs believe they are not deserving of being treated with dignity & respect, perpetuating feelings of fear and isolation.

What does liberation look like?

- Liberation is the act of setting someone free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression.
- In the context of drug use and sex work, liberation is about freedom from thoughts or behavior -- "the way it's supposed to be" -- and how we are conditioned to perpetuate harms to others.

What does stigma look like?

- Stigma limits a person's ability to access services they need because they feel unworthy of receiving or requesting services
- Stigma creates barriers while receiving services by people feeling unwelcome or judged by program staff that offers services

TREE OF LIBERATION

TREE OF STIGMA

LEAVES: ACTIONS

Create plans together based on their goals

Ask clarifying questions to understand the whole story and needs

Share resources and education for their friends to have

LEAVES: ACTIONS

Ignore the story and project your own agenda

Require mandatory XYZ because "they won't do it otherwise"

Only talk about the "disease" and not about what they have control over

TRUNK: BELIEFS

"They can do _____"

"They're telling me the truth"

"They care about the community"

TRUNK: BELIEFS

"They're probably lying"

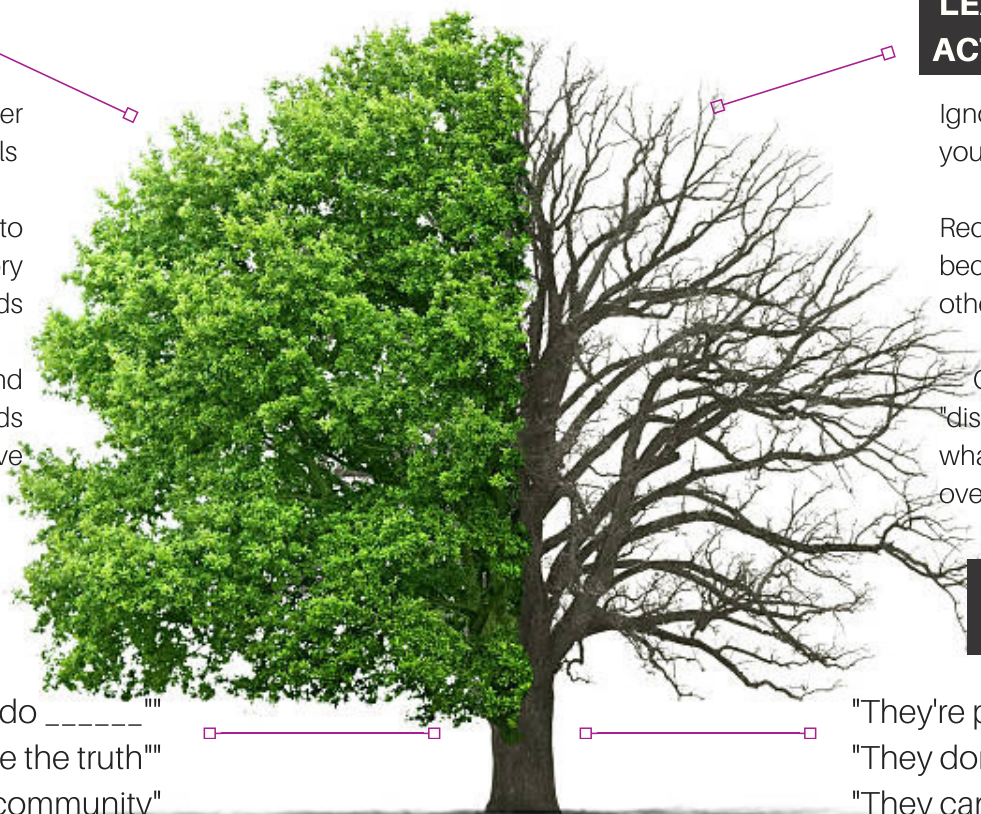
"They don't have the willpower"

"They can't help themselves"

Capable
Trustworthy
Caring

ROOTS: PERCEPTIONS

Not trustworthy
Lazy
Sick



HOW WE STIGMATIZE PEOPLE

PATHOLOGIZING DRUG USE & PATRONIZING PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

Implying that people who use drugs are diseased, don't have control over themselves, or can't be trusted

BLAMING PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS & IMPOSING OUR OWN MORAL JUDGEMENTS

Telling people that use drugs that they don't care about themselves or their community

CRIMINALIZING PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

Asking someone who may look like they use drugs if they have ever been incarcerated during an employment interview & being immediately disqualified

CREATING FEAR AROUND PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS WHICH SERVES TO ISOLATE THEM

Believing people that people who use drugs are morally corrupt, untrustworthy, dangerous to children & the community

HOW YOU CAN BRING IT TO YOUR WORK



Actively include people who use drugs & experience marginalization for their expertise when developing new programming or evaluating current one



Emphasize building relationships & trust with people who use drugs as important outcomes



Consider how past histories of trauma, violence, layers of disadvantage & stigma may affect a person's ability to engage with providers



Ensure services are grounded in an understanding of how people's health, priorities, & experiences are shaped by the criminalization of drug use



Ensure all services are provided in a culture of respect & safety within workplace



Review documents & materials to ensure we are using people first language/non-stigmatizing language & change them if necessary

For more resources, visit harmreduction.org