



Wisconsin Initiative for Stigma Elimination

Principles of Stigma Reduction to Increase Inclusion and Support

Research on stigma has found the most effective way to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness is for people to meet people living in recovery with mental illness and learn their story. As defined by SAMHSA, recovery is “A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.”

Learning from research and best practices, WISE overcomes stigma by promoting and demonstrating the application of the principles of Strategic Disclosure and Planned Contact.

PRINCIPLE OF STRATEGIC DISCLOSURE

Strategic disclosure is the process of telling one's story of living with mental illness based on informed decision-making.

- Learning how, when and to whom to tell one's story of mental health challenges and the process of recovery is an important aspect of recovery.
- Self-Stigma is reduced when a person living with a mental illness can integrate and share their experiences of mental illness and recovery.
- Disclosure should be supported with relevant resources that are culturally appropriate and support recovery.
- Disclosure of one's story happens at many levels, along a spectrum from; very limited disclosure to family and friends, to a planned disclosure to the public with the goal of increasing inclusion and reducing stigma.

PRINCIPLE OF PLANNED CONTACT

Contact is defined as planned interactions between people living with mental illness and individuals or groups for the purpose of increasing inclusion and reducing stigma.

Using this principle, WISE intends to overcome stigma by promoting and supporting “Planned Contacts” that contain specifically designed messages from storytellers living in recovery with a mental illness.

➤ **Role of the Storyteller**

The storyteller's message should include illustrations of their personal recovery journey including:

- Symptoms and the role symptoms played in their illness and recovery.
- Recovery process and tools used to achieve improved wellness.
- The effect stigma had on accessing recovery options and examples of challenging stigma barriers.
- How stigma affects work, education, personal and family relationships.
- Sharing examples of accommodations that assisted in recovery and reaching life goals.
- Description of positive personal traits that one brings to their school, work, family and community.
- Recovery is dependent on being engaged in a community that understands and is accepting and supportive of recovery.
- The story is strongest when 50% focuses on recovery- the way up from the dark times.

➤ **Credibility of the Storyteller**

When the life experiences of the storyteller match the audience, the storyteller has more credibility.

- Credibility is enhanced when the storyteller and audience have similar ethnicity, religion, and/or socioeconomic status.
- An audience that perceives the storyteller as understanding their life experiences and challenges is more believable and will have a greater impact.
- Partnerships between a presenter and a storyteller that is representative of the target group are most effective: for example a presentation by a person with lived experience and their employer including challenges and accommodations necessary for the presenter to have a successful work experience.

➤ **Contacts should be Tailored**

Contacts need to be strategically tailored to the individual or audience.

- Develop an understanding of the individual or audience by gathering background information and developing desired outcomes for the presentation.
- Focus on groups that have strong influence in the community such as employers, landlords, school administration, civic organizations, and faith-based organizations.
- Message should illustrate to audience how to successfully adapt the environment to address the needs of people living with mental illness.

➤ **Contacts should have Local Context**

Effectiveness will be increased by understanding the local demographics and tailoring the message by:

- Being knowledgeable about the challenges and resources within the region;
- Understanding the diversity within the area;
- Avoiding assumptions and stereotypes about people from a specific location.

➤ **Contacts Must be Continuous**

To sustain the impact and affect change, interactions with people living with mental illness must be continuous.

- One-time interactions can have positive effects, but impact on stigma reduction likely will not be sustained.
- Long-term change will occur when people have many encounters with people living with a mental illness who share their message of recovery in multiple venues.
- Contact message should be revised frequently to keep fresh and relevant to the audiences.

➤ **Contacts are Tailored to the Specific Change Desired in the Targeted Group**

The changes you want the group to make that would demonstrate reduced stigma and increased inclusion and support need to be defined and stories selected to elicit these changes.

➤ **Evaluation**

Effective methods of evaluation should drive planning and program revision.

These Principles were developed by WISE and based on the work of Patrick Corrigan, Patrick J. Michaels, Blythe Buchholz and the National Consortium of Stigma and Empowerment.