



## The Stigma of Drug Addiction A Barrier to Treatment and Recovery

Fogler, a physician who struggled with addiction provided the below description of how a person is affected by the stigma of addiction.

*“Stigma violates the right of people with addictions to be human, strips us of our dignity, and says to us that we have no value. It evokes feelings of shame so deep they are hard to know unless you’ve experienced them. This isn’t the kind of shame that guides us or tells us we’ve made a mistake. It’s toxic shame, the shame that tells us we are the mistake — something those of us with this disease come to believe. It tells us that we’re never safe and keeps us silent, hiding and alone, unvalued members of the human tribe. And that’s how many of us with this disease die: hopeless, spiritually empty, and alone.”*

### Facts about Stigma:

- The stigma associated with drug addiction is pervasive and is a major barrier to the health and well-being of people with an addiction.
- The stigma of drug addiction is based on misconceptions or assumptions that addiction is a choice, lack of willpower, and/or a moral failure. **Fact: It is a chronic, relapsing, and treatable brain disease, not a choice.**
- Stigma leads people to believe a person takes drug for pleasure. **Fact: Drugs are taken to end agonizing distress (depression, anxiety, fear, etc) and to satisfy powerful cravings.**

### How Stigma Affects a Person with Addiction:

- **Hide Their Drug Use:** Feelings of guilt and shame, being criticized or treated poorly causes a person to hide their drug use and **prevents treatment.**
- **Experience Rejection by Others:** *Rejection is a powerful punishment, which promotes continued and possibly intensified drug use.*
- **Inadequate Medical Care:** Healthcare provider stigma can lead to inadequate care, refusal to provide care, and can result in avoidance of a person seeking care.
- **Discrimination:** Discriminatory hiring practices, denial of housing and health care, etc.

### Ways to Stop the Stigma of Drug Addiction:

- ⇒ Promote awareness that addiction is a chronic, relapsing, treatable brain disease.
- ⇒ Do **not** use derogatory comments or hurtful labels (i.e.: addict, junkie, drug abuser, etc).
- ⇒ Be aware of your own bias and attitude.
- ⇒ Be kind, offer support, and do **not** judge a person with an addiction.
- ⇒ Show dignity and respect to a person with an addiction.



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