



POLICY	STIGMA POLICY
APPROVED	JUNE 2020
REVIEWED	
VERSION	1
SCHOOLS	PRESCHOOL, PREPARATORY

PURPOSE

This policy exists to protect both staff and learners within the school environment from stigmatisation of any sort. In order to promote mental well-being and a harmonious schooling environment, stigmatisation for any reason will not be tolerated.

Aims of this policy

- To provide a safe and secure learning environment;
- To value and respect each person and their property;
- To promote a loving and caring atmosphere where empathy and concern for others is valued;
- Create a school environment in which any member of the schooling community is able to reach out in they are unhappy or threatened in any way; and
- Clarify procedures for noting and reporting incidents of bullying and stigmatisation behaviour.

STIGMA DEFINITION

A stigma is a negative stereotype assigned to people when an attribute of theirs is considered different or inferior to societal norms. Stigmas often lead to prejudicial attitudes and discriminating behaviours towards the individual. Stigmas can have adverse affects on individuals who experience them.

Where do stigmas come from

We create stigmas against other people because:

- We are uninformed or misinformed about attributes of people (e.g. we don't know a lot about their culture, language, race, preferences, etc.); and
- we are scared of the unknown.

Stigma can result in

- People trying to hide attributes about themselves to avoid discrimination;
- people being reluctant to seek help they need (medical otherwise);
- social rejection, avoidance, and isolation;
- harassment, violence, or bullying;
- poor mental health and wellbeing;
- increased feelings of shame and self-doubt;
- poor quality of life.

Signs that someone may need help:

- Persistent fear, worry and anxiousness;
- persistent sadness, hopelessness and other overwhelming emotions;
- withdrawal from others (the kind that is different from the social distancing prescribed by the department of health);
- loss of interest in personal appearance and unusual lack of energy;
- deterioration of work, mislaid belongings or underachievement
- expressing rage or anger at the world;
- learner's unwillingness to attend school, lateness, erratic attendance;
- nail biting, flinching, jumpiness, forgetfulness, distractibility;
- regression in key milestones already met in young children (e.g. regression in toilet training);
and
- use of or increased use of drugs or alcohol.

ADDRESSING SOCIAL STIGMA

Children and teenagers are highly susceptible to stigma as they form their identities amidst developing social relationships, in which peer acceptance is highly valued. Stigmatisation of individuals and groups is a form of bullying and can create significant barriers to learning.

A school can begin to address stigmatisation by:

- Creating a culture that appreciates and celebrates individual and group differences
- Equip learners with the facts – many stigmas arise from ignorance and it is imperative that learners are educated on the underlying facts of a stigma.
 - Learners should be taught about stigmas, what they are and how they affect others
 - Learners should be given information about how to reach out for help if they are a victim of stigma and bullying
 - Learners should be educated on relevant and current stigma topics that are experienced within the school. For example, in the time of returning to school during Covid-19, stigmas could easily arise against learners who are at high risk, who have had Covid-19, whose family had Covid-19 or even those who have *not* had Covid-19. In this instance, it would be important to highlight how any of these factors makes an individual no different from his peers and that there is nothing to be afraid of.
 - Please access the WHO Covid-19 Stigma guide for tips to deal with Covid-19 related stigma.
- Teaching and practicing empathy for others
- Teach and encourage positive self-talk
- Maintain a sense of positive thinking and hope
- Creating an environment of support for any individuals who need special assistance
- Be prepared to handle and support situations in which learners have negative interpersonal experiences
- Refer specialised services for those who need it

Responsibilities of Staff

- Educate our learners on stigmatisation, its affects and stigmas that may be present in the school;
- Encourage self-love and respect, respect for others and celebrate diversity;
- Model caring and uplifting behaviours
- Be alert to the signs of victimisation
- Address an instances of bullying and stigmatisation by:
 - Talking to the learner and understanding the situation;
 - Reporting such events to the school principal;
 - Ensuring the learner’s parents/guardians are made aware of the situation;

- Addressing the cause of the stigmatisation and bullying.

Responsibilities of learners

- Have respect for all fellow peers and teachers;
- Do not engage in acts of stigmatisation and bullying of others;
- Report any instances of stigmatisation and bullying to a teacher;
- Ask for help from an adult should he/she become a victim of stigmatisation and bullying.

Responsibilities of parents

- Foster self-love in your child, build up their self-confidence and let them know they are loved no matter what happens;
- Teach your child to respect others and model this at home;
- Note any unusual behaviours in your child and note any reports from your child if they experience any victimisation. Communicate with the school should either of these become concerns.
- Be supportive and reassuring to your child.

Dealing with a situation of stigmatisation or bullying

1. If any stigmatisation or bullying is observed, it will be immediately stopped and addressed.
 - a. This includes once-off incidents, repeated incidents and intentional incidents.
2. The instance will be reported to the head principal who will investigate and record the incident. The learners involved may be interviewed to get an account of the incident and decide on the best way forward. Parents/guardians will be informed.
3. In collaboration with the school and with parents/guardians, the situation will be addressed in terms of:
 - a. Supporting the learner who has been victimised;
 - b. Addressing those who have driven the stigmatisation or bullying in both the school environment and at home;
 - c. Targets for acceptable behaviour may be set out including support measures for all pupils concerned.
 - d. Monitoring the situation to ensure it does not reoccur.
4. Significant incidents will involve further investigations, monitoring and recording.
5. Where necessary, the school may draw on the support of external agencies and therapy services.

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