



How stigma affects families of those with SUD.

Families can be significantly affected by stigma related to their loved one's substance use disorder. This stigma can impact a person's work and social life, as well as their mental and physical health.

Stigma is the most pervasive, subjective burden faced by families. It refers to stereotypes and biases that blame parenting, family relationships, and environmental factors for a person's substance use – as opposed to regarding substance use disorder (SUD) as the complex condition that it is.

The difficult reality of stigma.

Stigma has social, emotional, and behavioral consequences. It can result in the loss of a healthy support system. It can also create feelings of guilt and shame and conceal the facts of one's struggles.

Stigma originates from misconceptions and cultural attitudes toward SUD. Historically, substance use has been seen as a moral failing that involves blame and humiliation, which can lead to ostracism. The media sometimes portrays people with SUD as criminals, deviants, and burdens on society. These portrayals may affect public policy and resource allocation, making it harder for people to access the services they need.

Putting an end to stigma.

Combating stigma requires education, awareness, and comprehensive support networks. Healthcare providers and politicians must prioritize fair access to treatment and promote destigmatization. The vocabulary that's used to describe substance use disorders and mental health concerns is often extremely negative and can spread shame and stigma. And that needs to change. After all, words hurt but they can also heal.

By using person-first, inclusive language and courteous communication, we begin to reframe SUD, bringing us closer to a society where no one feels the need to hide their struggles. (See the graphic, below) Small ripples in the ocean create big waves. We, too, can create lasting change one step at a time.

Support and empathy are the true antidotes to stigma.

Encouraging empathetic and supportive environments can break down barriers, leading to greater acceptance and further awareness of the challenges individuals face. Fostering an environment of acceptance and understanding – where people can seek the help they need – will benefit the astounding number of people who struggle in silence out of fear of being judged.

Families play a crucial role in breaking the cycle of stigma.

The truth is, opening up about a loved one who struggles with either a mental health diagnosis or substance use disorder can be very intimidating. Whether you are anxious about being judged, blamed, or shunned, we all deserve to be received with empathy, compassion, and understanding – just as we would if our loved one suffered from any other condition.

Stigma thrives in the shadows. Therefore, being courageous enough to share your struggles may open the door to discovering pathways to wellness and new support systems. It also may help someone else who is suffering in silence.

To overcome the stigma surrounding substance use and mental health disorders, we need to use an integrated approach that takes into account societal attitudes, public policy, and individual opinions.

Awareness campaigns are critical to challenging stereotypes, debunking myths, and fostering empathy and compassion. Putting an emphasis on humanity will lead to a more understanding viewpoint among community members.

Asking for help is a courageous act.

If you have a loved one who is struggling with a substance use disorder and you aren't sure how to help them or yourself, please feel free to reach out to Alicia Peterson, RSS, McCall's Family Recovery Coach.

Alicia can connect you to resources, help you communicate effectively with your loved one, and help you create goals for your personal wellness and recovery plan. Email Alicia at Alicia.Peterson@mccallbhn.org or call 959.229.4814.



McCall's Family Recovery Coach Program is grant funded and provided at no-cost to all participants.

For more information contact:

Alicia Peterson, RSS
Family Recovery Coach

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alicia.peterson@mccallbhn.org

Resources

McCall Behavioral Health Network

860.496.2100
mccallbhn.org

McCall's Recovering Together Group

Meets every Wednesday,
5:30PM via Zoom.

Clifford Beers Clinic

New Haven
Christine Montgomery
203.915.4074
cmontgomery@cliffordbeers.org

Community Renewal Team

Hartford and Middletown
Casie DeRosier
860.549.3350

For more info, email:
leann.mitchell@mccallbhn.org

NAMI CT, Waterbury
Paul Brainerd
860.882.8674 or 860.310.4055
pbrainerd@namict.org

Sound Community Services
New London
Amy Faenza
860.439.6443
amy.faenza@soundct.org

derosierc@crtct.org

**TriCircle, Hope and Support
Groups**

Hope After Loss Groups
Ana Gopoian
860.349.7074
ana@tricycle.or

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