# **RESPECT TO CONNECT: UNDOING STIGMA**

# **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 & 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?

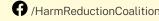
- Stigma limits a person's ability to access services they need because they feel unworthy of receiving or requesting services
- Stigma creates barriers while receiving services by people feeling unwelcome or judged by program staff that offers services

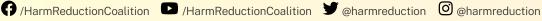
#### TREE OF LIBERATION TREE OF STIGMA **Leaves:** Actions **Leaves:** Actions Ignore the story & Create plans together based on their goals project your own agenda Ask clarifying questions Require mandatory XYZ to understand the whole because "they won't do it otherwise" story & needs Share resources & Only talk about the education for their "disease" & not about friends to have what they have control over **Trunk:** Beliefs **Trunk:** Beliefs "They can do \_\_\_\_\_" "They're probably lying" "They're telling me the truth" "They care about the community" "They don't have the willpower" "They can't help themselves" **Roots:** Perceptions **Roots:** Perceptions Capable **Trustworthy** Not trustworthy Caring Lazy

Sick

Revised 2020

FOR MORE RESOURCES, VISIT HARMREDUCTION.ORG







**NATIONAL** HARM REDUCTION COALITION

## 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

# & imposing our own moral judgements

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

Blaming people who use drugs

#### 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



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



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



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



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



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

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