THE FIRST DOOR

Part 1: Stigma, Bias & Building Trust

REDUCING STIGMA • STRENGTHENING CONNECTION



TRAINING OVERVIEW

The first interaction someone has with a professional or system can shape their willingness to disclose substance use, ask for help, and remain engaged in care and services.

Part 1 explores how stigma, bias, language, shame, and previous experiences influence trust. Through lived experience, reflection, and practical strategies, we will examine how our responses can either create barriers or open doors to meaningful support.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **STIGMA ISN'T ALWAYS INTENTIONAL, BUT ITS IMPACT IS REAL.**
   Our assumptions, language, and actions can create barriers without us realizing it.

2. **FEAR AND SHAME CAN LOOK LIKE RESISTANCE.**
   What we interpret as disengagement may be someone's attempt to protect themselves from judgment or consequences.

3. **LANGUAGE MATTERS, BUT HOW WE MAKE PEOPLE FEEL MATTERS MORE.**
   Words can either open or close doors. Choose language that is respectful, person-centered, and strengths-based.

4. **LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND, NOT TO FIX.**
   People deserve to be heard, believed, and included in decisions that affect their lives. Sometimes being heard is the beginning of connection.

5. **THE FIRST RESPONSE CAN CHANGE WHAT HAPPENS NEXT.**
   Every interaction is an opportunity to build trust, create safety, and open a door to meaningful support.

WHAT PREGNANT AND PARENTING FAMILIES MAY BE NAVIGATING

- Fear of CPS involvement or losing custody
- Shame and stigma (especially in medical settings)
- Withdrawal, cravings, and survival mode
- Pressure to "prove" they're a good parent
- Multiple systems, appointments, and expectations
- Housing, transportation, and basic needs
- Previous negative experiences with systems

What looks like resistance is often protection.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What assumptions might I make before hearing someone's story?
2. How might my words or actions unintentionally reinforce stigma?
3. What is one thing I can do differently to help create a safer, more supportive experience for the next person who walks through my door?

We may not know everything someone carries when they walk through our door.
But we can choose what they experience when they get there.

PEOPLE • CONNECTION • COMPASSION • STRONGER FAMILIES • BRIGHTER FUTURES