



Questions and Answers (Stigma)

Q. What is stigma?

A. Stigma was originally defined as a mark that differentiated people from others, because of this they were then separated from others. The physical behaviors related to stigma are called discrimination.

Q. How is stigma related to HIV/AIDS?

A. People who are living with HIV/AIDS often find themselves negatively viewed and differentiated from society as a whole. Discrimination of this occurs in many ways, such as through unemployment, medical care, or abandonment. Children, whether they themselves are carrying HIV or not, whose parents are living with HIV/AIDS also are greatly affected by the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS. An example of this is children who have rocks thrown at them because their parents had died of AIDS.

Q. What kind of stigma exists?

A. In response to HIV/AIDS many people express a fear, prejudice, denial, shame, and discrimination relating those who are living with HIV/AIDS.

Q. Why is there stigma against HIV/AIDS?

A. HIV/AIDS is a life threatening disease; this is a great source of peoples fear and related responses. Secondly, HIV/AIDS is related to socially taboo topics, namely sexuality, that prevents people from wanting or willing to talk about the issue.

Q. Does this really matter?

A. Yes. Stigma and discrimination is a great barrier for altering the path of this pandemic. When people are stigmatized and discriminated against there is a lower interest to seek testing and medical services. When society has certain beliefs about HIV/AIDS it relates to how often services are utilized. When stigma is entrenched people begin to increase their denial of HIV/AIDS. No one wants to think about HIV/AIDS when there are so many negative ideas and actions associated with the virus. This prevents any change in the current trends and hinders educational efforts.

Q. If we separate those with HIV away from the rest, won't that stop the epidemic?

A. No. It has been show that this type of overt discrimination would increase stigma and no one would become tested because of it. This halt of testing would end up increasing prevalence because no one would have knowledge of their HIV status.