How to talk to your children about negative stigmas

- Highlight that the disability is only one aspect of who they are as a person, as opposed to a condition that defines them.
- Come up with positive coping strategies.
- Instead of focusing on what the negative stigmas say they can’t do, focus on things your children can do.
- Help your children respond to common questions about the disability that they have.
- Teach them not to be embarrassed or ashamed of their disability by emphasizing their strengths and abilities.
- Explain to your children that the differences in how their brain works may actually make them more skilled in certain areas than other kids.

To learn more information go to our website:

Uncovering the Mysteries of Disabilities @
http://faculty.frostburg.edu/mbradley/disabilities/umd.html

STIGMAS

A Guide For Parents

This pamphlet was created by Frostburg State University Psychology Students as part of the Center for Children & Families. Please distribute as needed for educational purposes.
**What is a Stigma?**

A stigma is the use of negative stereotypes and labels. It is frequently considered a disgrace when describing another person. This definition includes the unfavorable labeling of someone with a condition and discriminating against someone on the basis of their label.

People who have identities that society negatively values are said to be stigmatized. They state that how others judge them is one of the greatest challenges in having a complete and satisfying life.

**In The Media**

How the media portrays people with disabilities reflect society’s lack of knowledge for disabilities.

How the media typically portrays people with disabilities:

- Weak
- Vulnerable
- Abnormal - different
- Victims
- Pitiful
- Used for sympathy
- Criminals
- Suffering

When people with disabilities are seen in the media they are seen as just their disability, not as normal human beings (parents, children, workers, and sports players). Much of the media leaves out the fact that just as everyone else, people with disabilities experience the same pains and pleasures of life.

**Positive Associations to Replace Negative Stigmas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Stigmas</th>
<th>New Associations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Retard” or “She’s retarded” or “She’s mentally challenged”</td>
<td>“She has a cognitive disability.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He’s in special ed” “He’s dumb” or “He’s stupid”</td>
<td>“He receives special education services”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“She’s disabled/handicapped/crippled”</td>
<td>“She has a physical disability.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicapped Parking</td>
<td>Accessible parking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“She’s a normal or healthy person.”</td>
<td>“People without disabilities”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general...

Refer first to the person, not their illness.

Use phrases such as a “He has autism” rather than “He’s autistic” or “That’s an autistic child.”