

# STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH DISCRIMINATION & STIGMA

## **Victim Stage: Not recognizing mistreatment, being powerless, &/or trying to be like the majority or please the majority to minimize distress→ losing power**

- Accept what you are told about yourself and life without question
- Try to fit in to belong: Deny, reject, suppress, or sacrifice aspects of self (feelings, needs, opinions, dreams) and adapt self to the majority in trade for the chance of approval, closeness, success, and relief and avoid rejection and loss of status
- Try to find relief and control through coping strategies that avoid conflicts (not knowing the long-term eventual failure or problem of these strategies or other powerful solutions)
- See yourself as the problem and take all responsibility in fixing it. Not many of us want to see ourselves as victims or see others, especially those we care for, as flawed. For example, most children will blame themselves when bad things happen or relationships go rocky. This gives a sense of “control” by helping to make sense of things and provide a purpose to “make things better,” but it also misleads and damages through shame.
- Worry, ruminate, or focus constantly on fixing the conflict or figuring out the problem, which cannot be solved in your head, by yourself, in that moment, or in the way you hope (for example, by being the perfect child to compensate for “flaws” or difference)
- Isolate from yourself (through denial, compartmentalizing life, being self-critical) or others (avoid, withdraw, lie) to manage distress
- See the solution to your problems as only in the hands, actions, and changes of others or changing yourself to fit in with them.
- Suffer, hoping others will notice and change their ways to help you.
- Base your actions solely on the reactions you expect from others. Because you cannot control the reactions of others, you are constantly set up to feel bad and out of control.

## **Survivor Stage: Developing *stigma competence* (that is, emotional, physical, psychological, and/or verbal self-defense) and seeing yourself separate from society’s negative view of you**

- Explore and reevaluate who you are and what you’ve learned: Develop self-knowledge, self-compassion, & self-direction
- Explore and examine information from varied sources to obtain a comprehensive view of you, the situation, problem, or issue, and thus have more options
- Question authority and judgments about you
- Externalize “the problem” rather than seeing yourself as only the problem
- Confront shame—what are the lies or inaccurate/false information? Identify what is right and wrong for you. Know your truth (for example, “Emperor’s clothes”). Realize only you are the best authority on you
- Acknowledge to self the oppression and attack on self: Bear witness to your own experience/pain/growth
- Understand and attribute negative outcomes to prejudice or discrimination (reduce shame, “I am not the cause of this; it’s discrimination’s fault”)
- Compare yourself and your concerns with others who share the impact of stigma
- Acknowledge to self the wounds and effects of oppression: Develop self-compassion
- Acknowledge and honor how you’ve coped: See your coping as sincere attempts for power, meeting needs, and doing the best you can with the knowledge you had
- Challenge the stigma and those who stigmatize - Stand up to them inside or outwardly
- Reevaluate and replace self-denigrating beliefs by identifying faulty reasoning. Reject false beliefs and norms from the majority that don’t fit you
- Receive and look for positive & accurate information to replace the former false beliefs

- Get angry at how you've been treated and set limits so you are not mistreated again: Express to others how the stigma affects you negatively (they may not know)
- Set, defend boundaries (reclaim/protect what is yours): Develop a range of skills to do so
- Express more aspects of self that have been oppressed: Spend time focusing on exploring and expressing these aspects (for example, reject heterosexual norms and adopt societal LGBT norms: LGBT Pride and/or self-pride)
- Meet others like yourself: Spend more time searching for and relating to similar others
- Know and protect your inherent rights (and pursue developmental rites)
- Know your needs and be creative in acting on them
- Fight for yourself by fighting against others' attack on you
- Continue to look to the majority or others to change so that you can feel better

**Thriving Stage: Developing your own unique, positive, and complex identity, power, and perspective**

- Continue to validate more of “the whole package” of you: Participate in more things that are centered on your values, needs, dreams, & strengths
- Seek more internal and external integration: Live less compartmentalized; life is not “either-or.” Develop all aspects of yourself simultaneously and/or sequentially
- Come to terms what is and what cannot be (for example, not all choices are possible) & what you don't know (that is, let go of false hopes, unsolvable agendas; see ambiguities)
- Grieve losses & “impossible selves”: Acknowledge what you lost or cannot have, adapt by focusing on your needs, be creative in adjusting, and reinvest with new wisdom
- Use your self-knowledge and wisdom to make choices for you
- Decide which norms or beliefs fit you and are essential to your survival and growth: Live by your own self-informed norms, ethics, values, virtues, and goals
- Dream realistically, but dream and dream creatively.
- Develop more emotional, physical, and verbal self-defense: Strengthen confidence in supporting yourself in the face of attack, focusing on validating yourself and being open to understanding versus allowing others to violate your space and/or trying to change their mind to feel safe or powerful
- Develop internal strength: Look inside for support/validation when others cannot
- Grant autonomy to others but be responsible for protecting self, boundaries, and rights
- Find and enjoy many communities and affiliations that represent as many aspects of you
- Diversify your experiences, relationships, and communities to expand knowledge, self, and support: Look beyond binaries and “good” and “bad”
- Realize you can't “fit in” anywhere truly, live autonomously with others
- See and enjoy more of the ambiguities, paradoxes, and complexities of you, others, & life: Appreciate not knowing (that is, explore the unknown—terrifying but exciting because you trust you can support yourself enough through it)
- Stigma has less power in your life but you see it in others and take action
- Act courageously on behalf of others (that is, see the injustice and violation and take a stand): Fight for yourself and others instead of against others.
- Build bridges through dialogue to increase understanding, respect, and autonomy with those who think differently than you.