COVID-19 Monitor
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RMI

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PREVENT SOCIAL STIGMA RELATING TO COVID-19

Social stigma in the context of health is the negative association between a person or group of people who share certain characteristics and a specific disease. In an outbreak, this may mean that people are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately, and/ or experience loss of status because of a perceived link with the disease.

What is Social Stigma?

The level of stigma associated with COVID-19 is based on 3 main factors:

1.   It is a disease that's new and for which there are still many unknowns.

2.   We are often afraid of the unknown; and

3.   It is easy to associate that fear with others.

THE IMPACT OF STIGMA

Stigma can undermine social cohesion and prompt social isolation of groups, which might contribute to a situation where the virus is more, not less, likely to spread. This can result in more severe health problems and difficulties controlling a disease outbreak.

Stigma can:

1.   Drive people to hide the illness to avoid discrimina

2.   Prevent people from seeking health care immediat

3.   Discourage them from adopting healthy behaviours
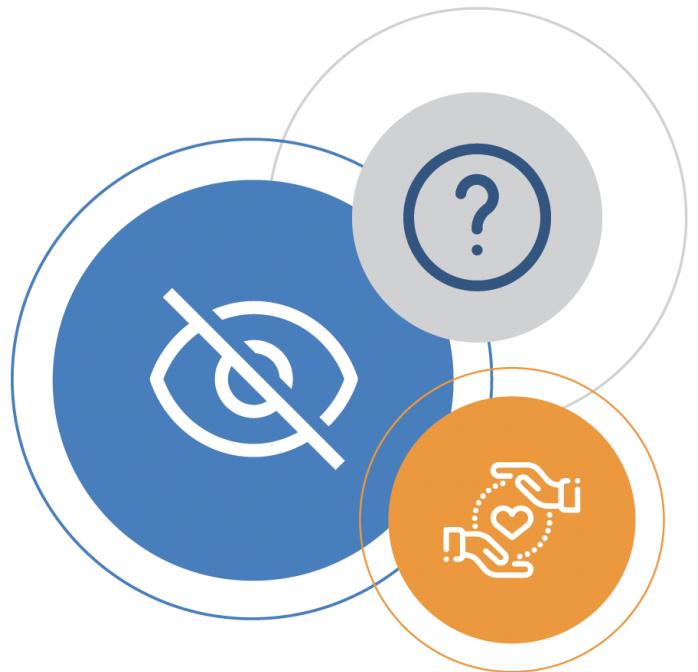
HOW TO ADDRESS SOCIAL STIGMA:

How we communicate about COVID-19 is critical in supporting people to take effective action to help combat the disease and to avoid fuelling fear and stigma. Employers need to create an environment in which the disease can be discussed and addressed openly, honestly, and effectively. When talking about the coronavirus disease, certain words and language may have a negative meaning for people and fuel stigmatizing attitudes (i.e. suspect, case, isolation). They can perpetuate existing negative stereotypes and assumptions, strengthen false associations between the disease and other factors, create widespread fear, or dehumanise those who have the disease. This can ultimately drive people away from getting screened, tested, and quarantined. It is recommended that inclusive language is adopted that empowers people.

Source: Business for South Africa Return to Work booklet