

Anti- Stigmatization Policy

At SAIS- Abu Dhabi, we understand the negative impact of stigma on our staff, students, parents as well school community. We have developed an anti-stigmatization policy to create a safe, productive environment. This policy will guide acceptable behaviour and ensure that the school environment is safe for students, teachers, and school staff to seek support, ask for help, and to avoid potential harms and problems related or associated to COVID 19.

We work so hard to reduce stigma by educating our staff, students, and parents on the harmful effects of stigma on others and on how to reduce or eliminate stigma among our school community.

WHAT IS SOCIAL STIGMA?

Stigma is when a student, staff or group of people view others in a stereotyped negative way. Stigma can lead to discrimination and isolation to students or group of students. During the pandemic and COVID 19, we have noticed an outbreak of stigma associated with the COVID disease and illness. This means that students are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately, and experience loss of status because of a perceived link with a disease. Such treatment can negatively affect those with the disease, as well as their caregivers, family, friends, and communities.

Anti-stigmatization is an approach to reduce stigma or fight stigma.

WHY IS COVID-19 CAUSING SO MUCH STIGMA?

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

- 1) It is a disease that is new and for which there are still many unknowns
- 2) Media plays a significant role in increasing fear with its controversial information.
- 3) People are often afraid of the unknown. Education can decrease fear and predict the unknown.
- 4) There is no cure or vaccination until now.

Unfortunately, these factors are fueling harmful stereotypes.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

Stigma can:

- Drive students, staff, and parents to hide the illness to avoid discrimination
- Prevent students, staff, and parents from seeking health care immediately
- Discourage students, staff and parents from adopting healthy behaviours

HOW TO ADDRESS STIGMA?

Staff, students, and parents, as well as the whole school community, will:

1. Build trust in school services and community. At SAIS- Abu Dhabi, our staff, students, and parents will learn about school reopening operation, health and hygiene arrangements safety measures, support services and the most important how the school will confidentially handle COVID 19 cases. Information about cases will not be shared with anyone other than the relevant government and related authorities. The school will train the parents. Parents will receive pamphlets about COVID 19 and a guide to school reopening. They will also receive weekly newsletter and emails to inform them about school updates.
2. Show empathy and avoid being judgmental. Students will learn about COVID 19 in their moral education and learn about its myths. They will receive affective education to understand the physiological, behavioural and cognitive signs of fear and anxiety associated with COVID 19. They will also learn when and how to seek school counselling support, health support, or to report stigma.
3. Get continuous training to understand the disease itself, and adopt effective, practical measures so they can help keep themselves safe and help others. The school will send an email to all school personnel and guide parents about the nearest hospitals and COVID-19 testing centre close to the school.
4. Communicate professionally and use inclusive language when dealing with COVID 19 cases. Our staff will be trained on how to handle situations in a professional way. When talking about coronavirus disease, certain words (i.e. the suspect case, isolation ...) and language may have a negative meaning for people and fuel stigmatizing attitudes. They can perpetuate existing negative stereotypes or assumptions, strengthen false associations between the disease and other factors, create widespread fear, or dehumanize those who have the disease. This behaviour can drive students, staff, and parents away from getting screened, tested, and quarantined. We recommend language that respects and empowers people.
5. Receive in school counselling sessions and cognitive intervention sessions. Thinking affects the way people feel and behave. The cognitive intervention geared toward helping students and staff assess uncertainty and develop realistic responses and coping statements which often reduce anxiety.
6. Report stigma or stereotype behavior or even bullying to supervisors. Supervisors will log the information given and share this case with the school counsellor to collect further information and to complete an incident report.