
Discrimination and Stigma

Worry and fear about the transmission of COVID-19 can lead to discrimination and stigma for children, adolescents, and their families. Health status discrimination may occur when someone associates a certain population or nationality with COVID-19. Stigma can occur when someone has been quarantined or isolated because of COVID-19 and then resumes their usual activities. When attempting to identify and mitigate discrimination and stigma, consider the influences of various persons involved (e.g., student, teacher, family, friends), the multiple environments and contexts encountered (e.g., home, work, and school) and how tasks and activities (i.e., occupations) are performed. Below are some tips that teachers and other school staff may want to consider when addressing discrimination and stigma.

Impact of Discrimination and Stigma

- [Impacts health and well-being both directly and indirectly](#)
- [Results in reduced reporting of symptoms and seeking medical attention](#)
- [Leads to poor adherence to preventative guidelines to reduce transmission due to fear of stigmatization](#)

Children At-Risk for Discrimination and Stigma

- Children whose parents are health care workers
- Children whose parents are frontline workers (e.g., delivery drivers and grocery store clerks)
- Children who have difficulty following social distancing guidelines or wearing masks and other facial coverings
- Children who have a family member who was treated for COVID-19
- Children from certain racial and ethnic groups, such as Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Black or African Americans
- Children who cough or sneeze for reasons other than COVID-19
- Children who live in group homes or other congregate settings
- Children who are homeless

Forms of Discrimination and Stigma

- Avoidance or rejection by peers
- Rumor spreading
- Physical acts of aggression
- Verbal aggression
- Cyberbullying

Ways to Address Discrimination and Stigma

- Teach children, family, and staff about the transmission of COVID-19.
- Work collaboratively with school personnel (administrators, related service providers, paraprofessionals, and other educators) to implement a school-wide tiered approach to formally address discrimination and stigma, and provide individual and group intervention services when needed for positive peer interactions and friendship development.
 - Observe peer interactions and intervene at the first sign of discrimination and stigma.

- Teach children at risk for discrimination and stigma to self-advocate and report concerns.
- Encourage children who are bystanders to stand up for peers and report concerns.
- Explain the consequences of discrimination and stigma, in developmentally appropriate terms.
- Communicate with families about discrimination and stigma.

Resources

- [AOTA's Guide to Acknowledging the Impact of Discrimination, Stigma, and Implicit Bias on Service provision \(PDF\)](#)
- [AOTA's Return to School Guide Mental Health and Well-being Tip Sheet \(PDF\)](#)
- [AOTA's Resource on Bullying Prevention and Friendship Promotion \(PDF\)](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Reducing Stigma](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights—Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Schools while Protecting Students' Civil Rights](#)