

## **Breaking the Stigma of Addiction:**

Several aspects of the community comes to mind about breaking the stigma of addiction: attitudes, responsibility, and maturity and love. All of these characteristics can hold individual and community relations back. Let's break down how a community can respond in a healthy way.

Attitudes are emotional responses to situations, people and ideas. We were not born with these feelings; we learned them from the outcome of our relationships with our parents, our friends, and other past experiences. As we continue to learn as we grow older but we are not always aware that we have become conditioned to feel, to think, to act in certain ways. With the stigmatization of addiction we often call people "junkies", "lowlives" and whisper behind our neighbor's back. If we continue this behavior then our neighbors often feel isolated, alone and afraid.

Responsibility when divided actually means our ability to respond to our own needs and the needs of those around us. Years of the stigmatization of addiction can hamstring the community into negative feelings. It makes the community simply unable to respond; but simply react. Many of us as a community confuse our responsibility to others with feelings of hopelessness. When the community feels hopeless often isolation occurs, resentment and impossibilities are seen.

Maturity is the art of living in peace with that which we can change. It is the quality in people which helps them balance their intellects and their emotions so that their behavior is appropriate. The ability to do the right thing at the right time requires a clear-eyed view of situations and people and an understanding of human limitations. Mature people resist the small mindedness of a small community, embrace change and also commit to community change.

Love cannot pass through a heart that is full of fear or resentment. If we protect, attack or develop an indifferent attitude about others around us; we then build a wall of mistrust around ourselves which keeps us from experiencing love. Then our growth as community is stifled. Love is what holds a community together.

Many times attitudes are based on fear. Most of the reactions to situations come in the form of blaming, running or freezing. When we blame others in a community we don't have to feel a deep sense of shame. When we run it is because facing fear and hurt seem too difficult. When we freeze it is because frozen hearts don't feel pain.

Our attitude and perception towards substance abuse and dependence is everything. It can be negative or positive. Reminding ourselves that no matter how much anguish we feel and how unbearable a situation seems nothing lasts forever. We as a community look at our part in situations, own up to mistakes, and change behavior. #positivecommunityaction

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