



## Page summary

This factsheet provides information about how stigma and shame can impact a person who uses crystal **methamphetamine** 'ice'. Some of the topics covered include:

- [What stigma and shame are.](#)
- [How these feelings can impact a person.](#)
- [How we can reduce stigma and shame in the community.](#)



## What is stigma and shame?

Stigma and shame can impact a person who is taking crystal **methamphetamine** ('ice'), their family or friends and their community. Stigma is when a person is made to feel different perhaps because of the way they live or for their behaviours. This leads to them being treated in a negative way as a result. Shame can be thought of as the impact or emotion that comes from stigma, like feelings of embarrassment, self-hate, sense of failure, feeling hopeless. This can also sometimes be called self-stigma.

People may experience stigma because of their cultural background such as identifying as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, (which may also be a source of pride), their use or dependency on drugs or alcohol or from other life challenges such as unemployment. Individuals, family or friends and communities may experience stigma and shame for a variety of reasons due to fear of visits from police, child services and other government agencies. Stigma and shame can also lead to people becoming disconnected from friends, family and important events.

## Who may experience feelings of shame and stigma?

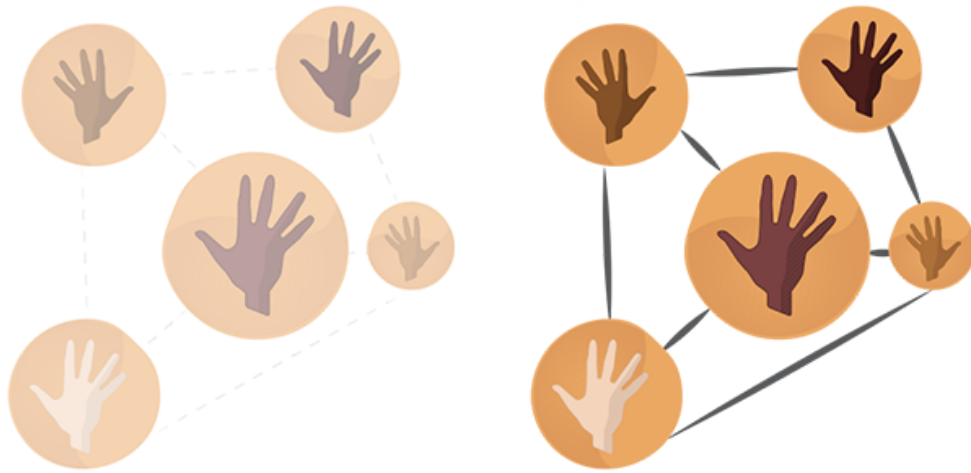
**People who use ice** may have feelings of shame for lots of different reasons. Some of these may be because of things such as their culture, the impact of their use of drugs on family or community and the type of drugs or alcohol they use. Research has found that:

- Experiencing feelings of shame is common for young Aboriginal people regardless of whether they use alcohol or other drugs.
- People who use ice may feel more shame and fear because of negative advertising on television and the suggestion that people who use drugs are violent.

- **Family and friends** of people who use ice also describe feelings of shame and say that these feelings may stop them asking for help and socialising with and connecting with important others. Families also have increased feelings of shame because of their family member's actions, particularly after having contact with child protection services, police and the justice system.
- **Communities and its members** may also experience stigma and feelings of shame. Community members may feel embarrassed by people using ice in their community. Suggestion from media outlets of violent behaviour may also create a sense of fear in the community.

## How can shame and stigma affect us?

- It may create barriers to asking for help. This may affect people who use ice, their friends and family or community members. "Personal fears or feelings of shame were seen as barriers to some clients' help seeking" (Lee et al. 2014).
- People may be more isolated and feel separate from those that can help them such as family, friends or community. This disconnection may impact negatively on peoples mental and physical health.
- People may feel worthless, hopeless and lonely. This may lead to people using more ice at a given time or using ice on more occasions. It may also lead to mixing ice with alcohol or other drugs. People may feel like they are a lost cause and there is no way out of their use of ice.



## How can we reduce stigma/shame/fear?

- Look up the facts about ice, including why people use ice. Try to see the person behind the substance and understand the reasons people use ice. [Click here to view the 'Person behind the substance' animation.](#)
- Avoid shaming people who use drugs, rather try to connect with them through conversations. Encourage those who may be experiencing difficulties with their use to seek support and remind them that there is no shame in asking for help.
- Focus on connecting people with one another, their family, community and culture, being mindful of the need for safety around people who when they are affected by alcohol and other drugs. Being connected and having positive social identities have significant effects on individual health and wellbeing.
- Increasing awareness of the impact of stigma and shame amongst health professionals, local clinics and Alcohol and other Drug services. [Check out our factsheet on stigma, shame and fear for health professionals here.](#)

## Key Sources

Alcohol & Drug Foundation. *Stigma and Vulnerability to AOD*. 2017 <https://adf.org.au/insights/stigma-and-vulnerability/> retrieved on 26 October 2019.

Lancaster, K., Seear, K., Ritter, A. (2017). [Reducing stigma and discrimination for people experiencing problematic alcohol and other drug use](#). A report for the Queensland Mental Health Commission.

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MacLean, S., Hengsen, R., Stephens, R. (2017).

[Critical considerations in responding to crystal methamphetamine use in Australian Aboriginal communities.](#) Drug and Alcohol Review 36(4): 502-508.

Queensland Mental Health Commission, 2018. Changing attitudes, changing lives.

[Options to reduce stigma and discrimination for people experiencing problematic alcohol and other drug use.](#)