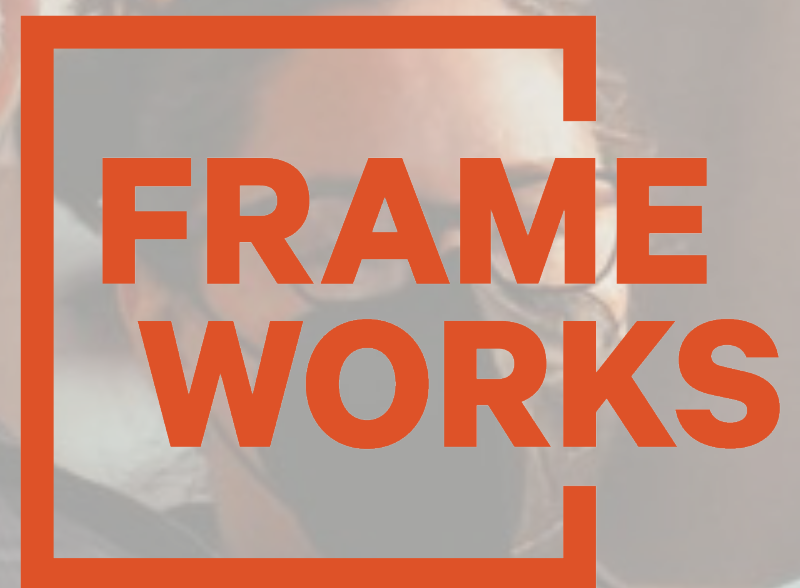


Framing Strategies to Move Beyond Stigma

Health Justice Framing Forum
September 16, 2026



Here's how we'll share space today

- **We are recording today's session and will share the recording and slides with registrants.**
- To bring a question or comment to the presenters' attention, **use the Q&A function.** Note that others in the meeting will be able to see your question.
- **Presenters probably won't see the chat.** The chat is open for participants to interact with each other or respond to content in real time. FrameWorks may also post links there.
- Presenters will pause in the middle, and at the end, to hear from you and respond to questions.
- For general reactions, please feel free to use the reaction feature.

Today's session

Spotlight on advocates: How stigma shows up in our work

What is stigma?

How addressing stigma alone can backfire & what a mindset approach can offer

Your questions

**We can't achieve
health justice without
powerful
communication.**

FrameWorks' Health Justice Program works toward a United States in which all the systems and policies that support health and well-being serve all people, eliminating disparities and advancing justice across communities.



FrameWorks' Health Justice Program is designed to support the field (you!)



Original Research



Framing & Narrative
Strategy



Deep Reframing
Partnerships

Today's speakers



Madison Essig
National Down Syndrome Society



Adriana Alejandre
Latinx Therapy



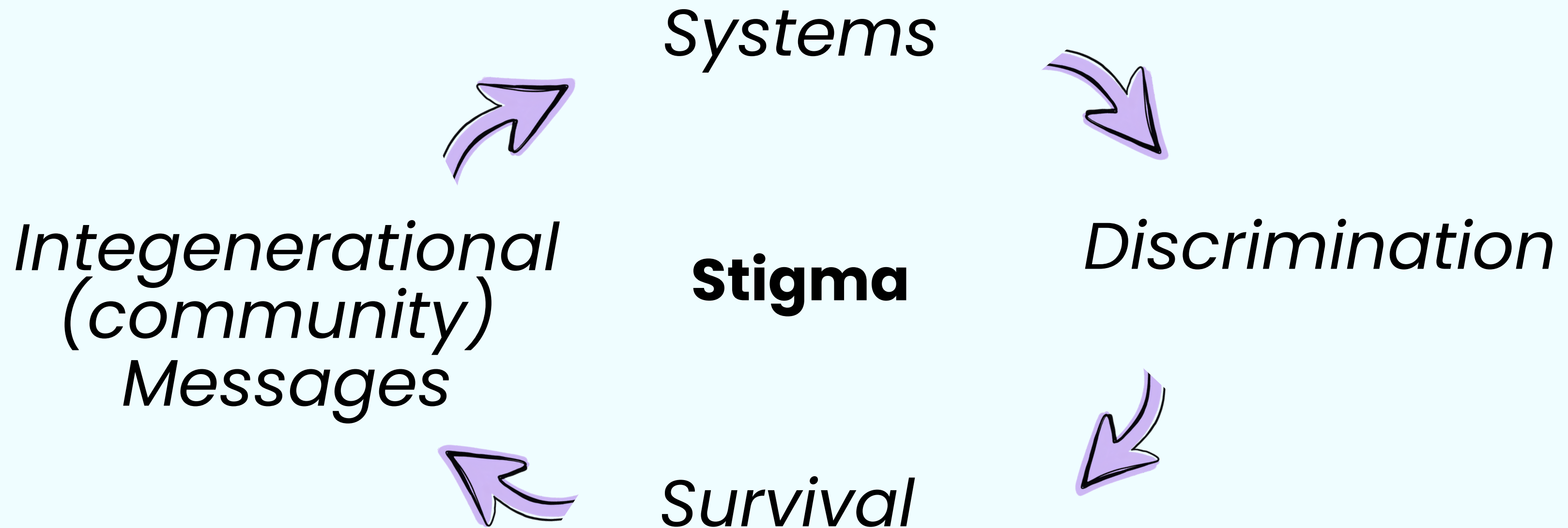
Zoe Gross
Autistic Self Advocacy Network



Hello! I'm Adriana
Alejandra Alejandre



The Cycle that Fuels Stigma



Reframing strategy #1

We should not only ask communities to trust systems.
We need to ask systems to become worthy of their trust.

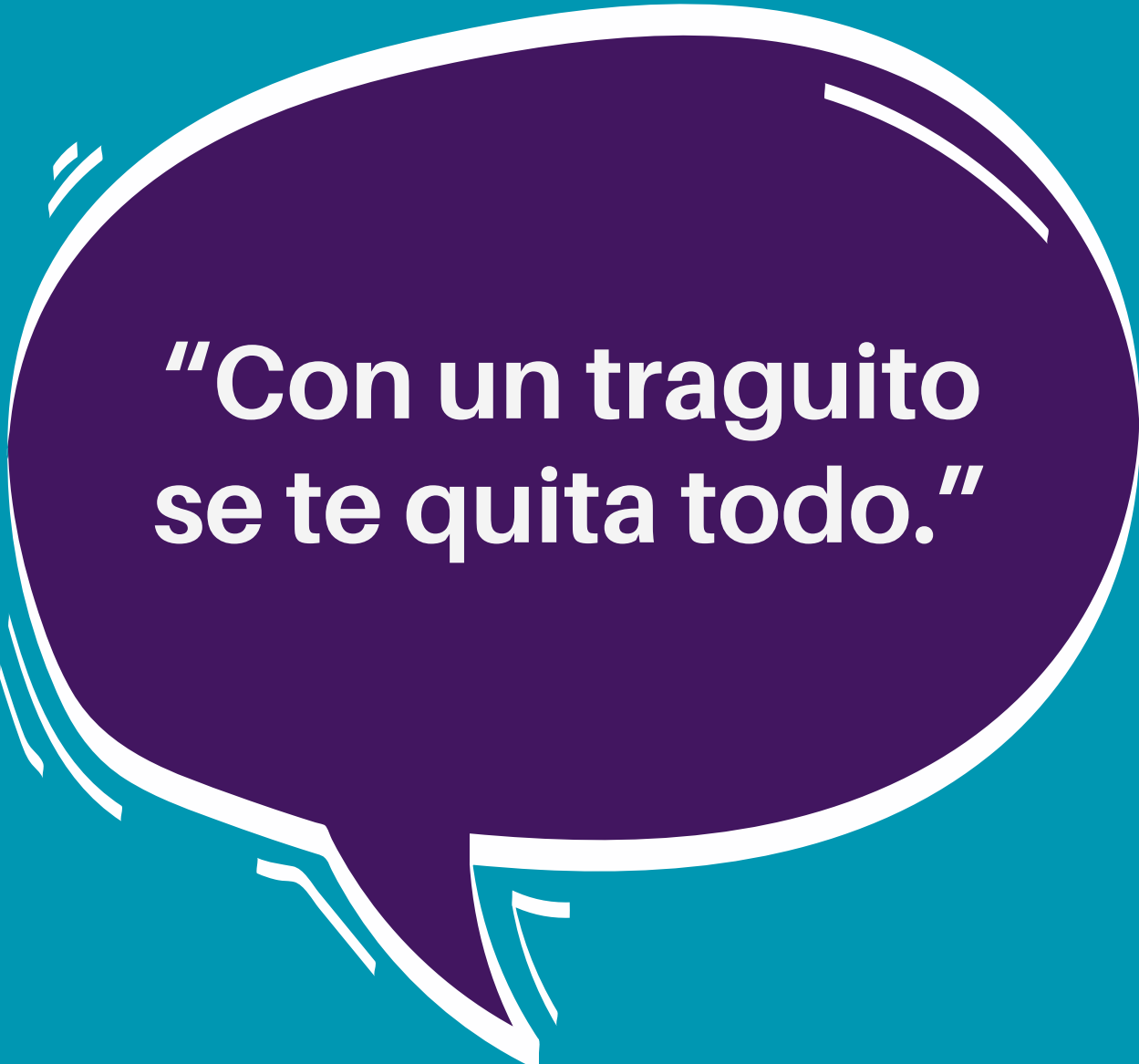


Stigmatizing Cultural Statements

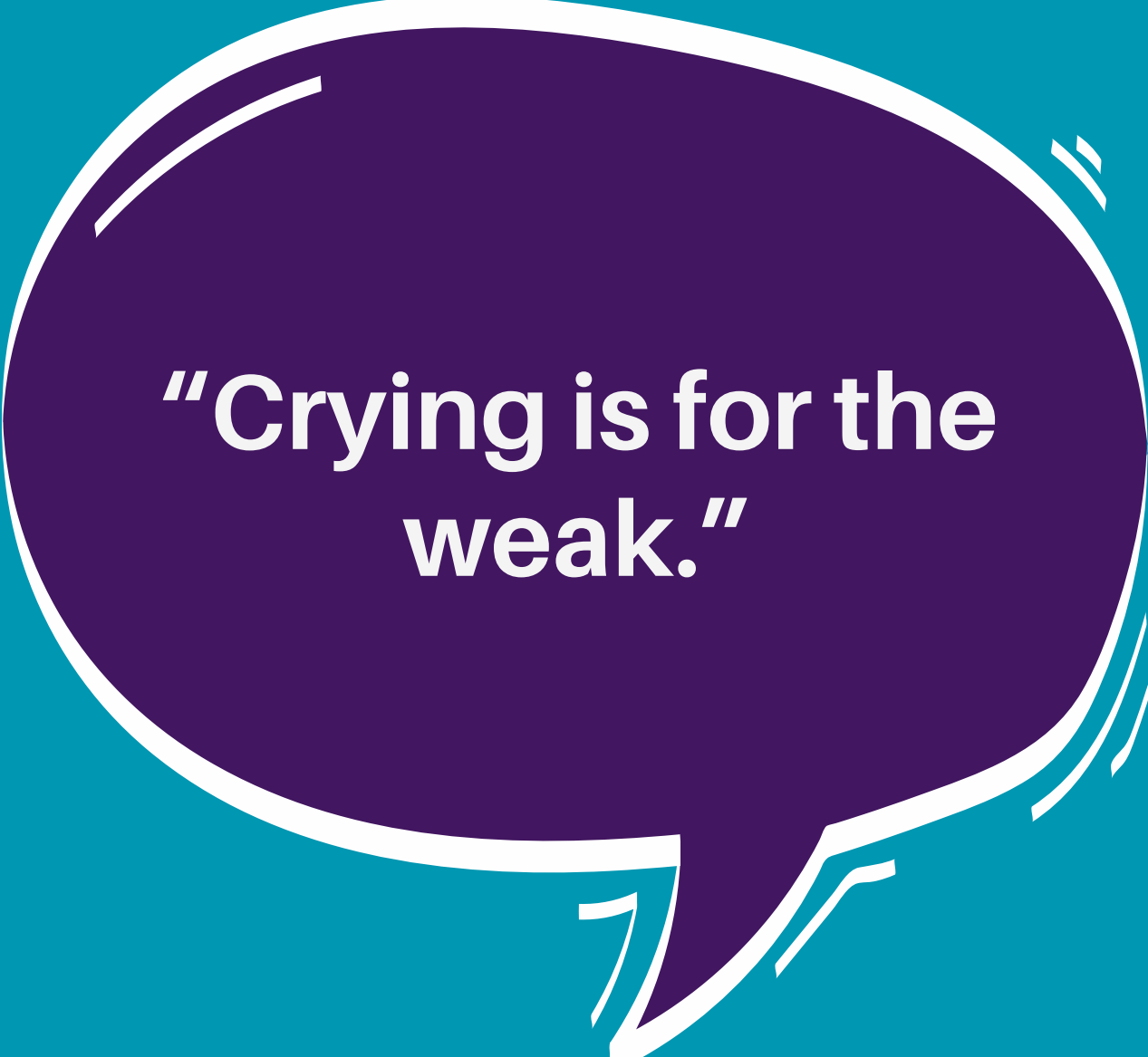
"En mis tiempos la depresión no existía."

"All you need to do is pray and talk to God."

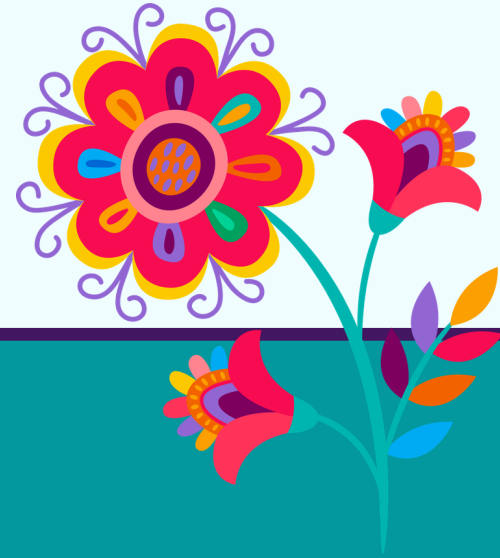
Stigmatizing Cultural Statements



**"Con un traguito
se te quita todo."**



**"Crying is for the
weak."**



HOW DO STIGMAS IMPACT SEEKING HELP?

are more likely to suffer quietly,

**increased psychiatric symptoms &
have reduced likelihood of seeking
help,**

**believe that they won't overcome
what they're going through and
achieve what they want (doubt),**

repeat cycles & patterns.



Reframing Strategies

1. Educate yourself on signs of declining mental health

- Personality changes
- Constant irritation/agitation
- Withdrawing
- Poor hygiene
- Work ethic changes

2. Create a psychologically safe environment.

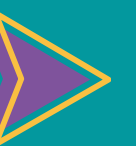
- Work or home environment where people can share how they are actually doing without threat of losing out on a promotion, big project. (Can be anonymous, too).
- Center voices that are impacted politically, societally, and marginally.

3. Advocate for mental health/psychological first aid trainings.



Activism Reflection

**What would need to change for
care to feel accessible,
culturally relevant, and safe?**



¡Gracias!

To Find a Therapist,
use my directory:
LatinxTherapy.com

Support@latinxtherapy.com

Find a Latinx Therapist Who Understands You

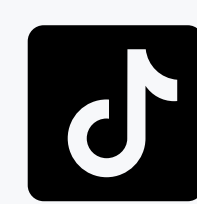
Connect with culturally responsive therapists who understand your experiences and provide compassionate care across the United States.

Therapists Medication Support Speakers

Session Format

Session Types

Search



@latinxtherapy

How does stigma show up in your work?

Answer in the chat

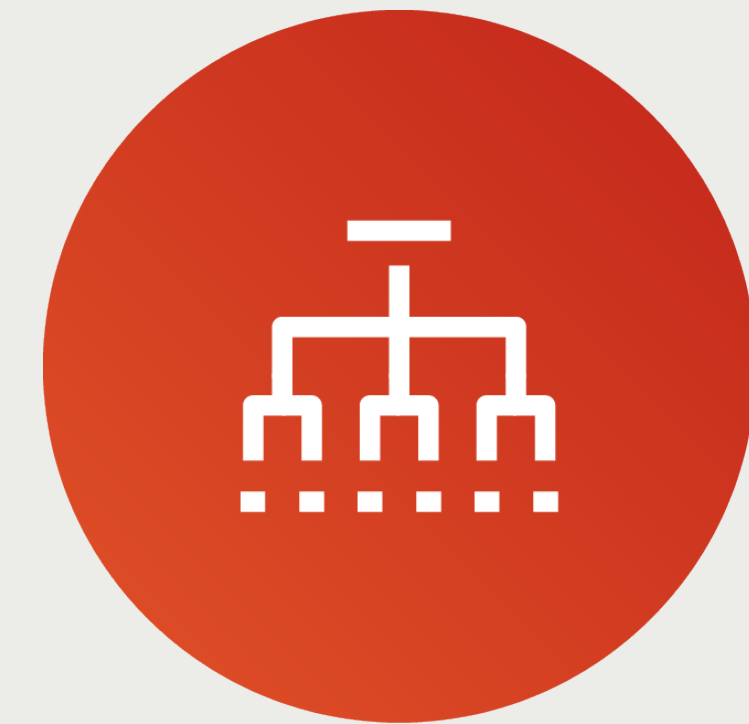
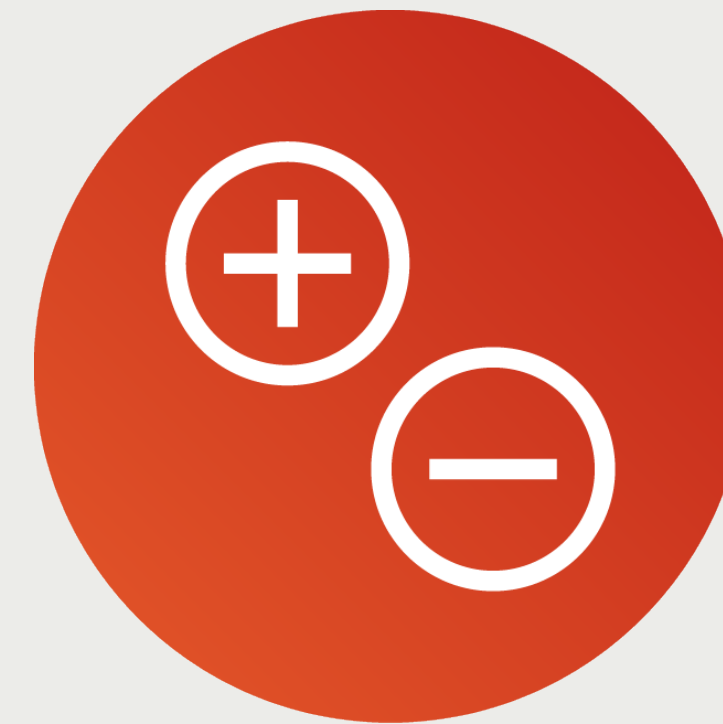
What is stigma?

A layered and dynamic process through which individuals or groups are devalued, discredited, or rejected based on shared attributes or status

Stigma involves:

- Labeling
- Stereotyping
- Separation
- Status loss
- Discrimination

Cultural Mindsets Are...



**Mindsets are patterns of thinking
that people use to make sense of
an issue**



**Stigma can be one
consequence of those
patterns of thinking**

Perceived control: Is the person seen as responsible for causing their own condition? (Individualism)

Perceived threat: Is the condition seen as dangerous, unpredictable, or contagious? (Otherism)

Visibility and disruptiveness: Does the condition visibly alter someone's behavior? (Otherism)

The mindsets that drive stigma are deeper than interpersonal bias. They are woven into our structures and institutions.

Addressing the mindsets behind stigma gives this work more lasting power.

**How addressing
stigma alone can
backfire**

Communications trap: Deservingness

“He was a bright, talented young man with a loving family, top grades, and a bright future ahead of him. He had everything going for him, which makes his struggle with depression all the more incomprehensible.”

“Despite her disability, she refused to let her condition define her, defying all odds and proving to the world that true strength comes from within.”

Communications trap: Pity or sympathy

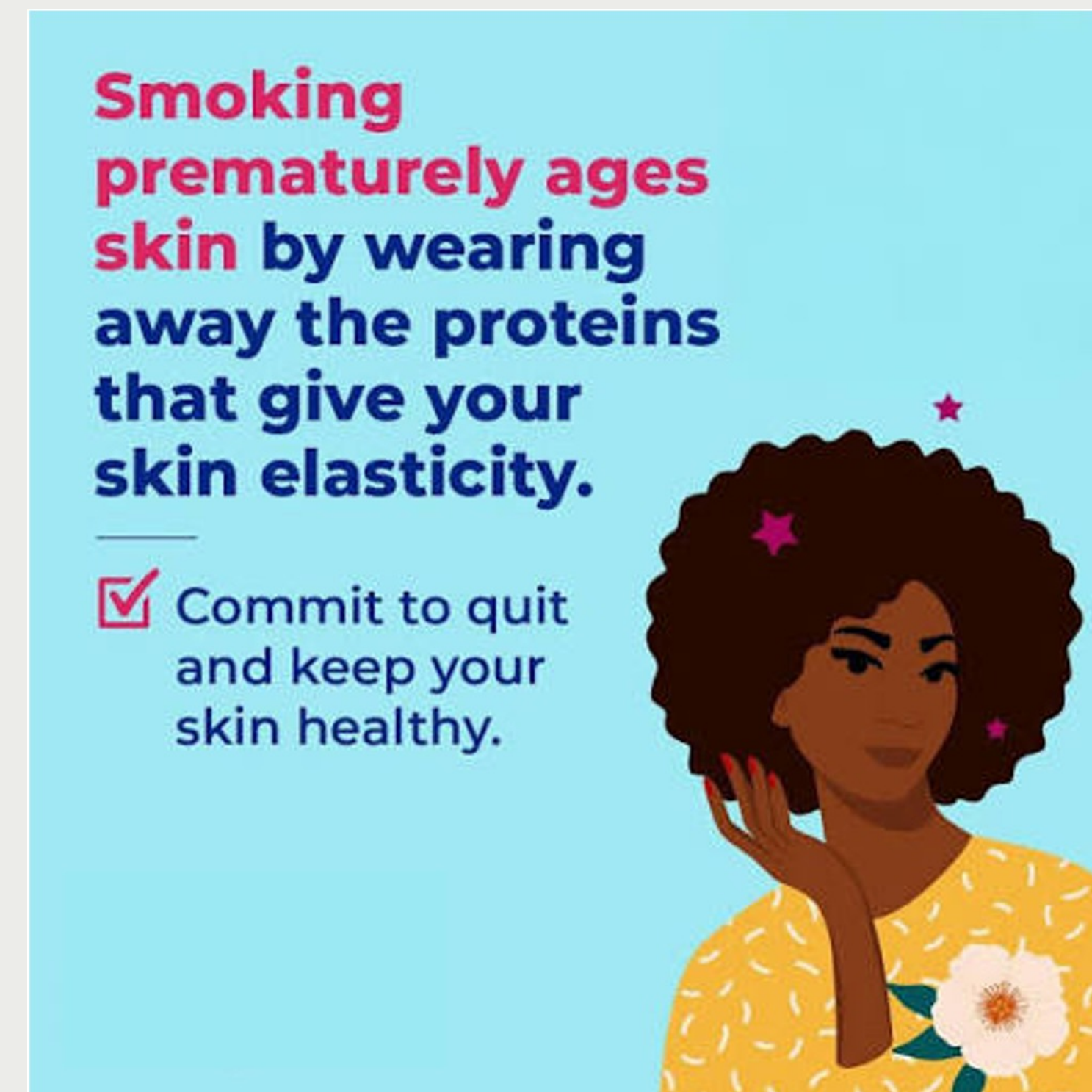
“For millions of Americans, every day is a battle against the darkness of mental illness. People are suffering in silence, trapped in overwhelming fear and isolation, wondering if anyone cares. Without support, their lives are put on hold—robbing them of their dreams, their stability, and their futures.”

Communications trap: Do one kind thing

“Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of. Next time you see someone struggling, don’t judge them—choose kindness. A warm smile or an open heart can change a life. Let’s build a world where everyone feels accepted for who they are.”

“People who use drugs aren’t bad people—they’re our sons, daughters, and neighbors. All they need is our love, acceptance, and understanding, not our judgment. Open your arms and accept them into your heart.”

Communications trap: Stigmatizing negative health behaviors



**What can we do
instead?**

Countering otherism



**Center lived experience as
essential system expertise**

Before: Eliciting Sympathy

Like many older people, Mr. Jameson has encountered discrimination in the healthcare system because of his age. After experiencing a stroke, he noticed that **his concerns were often dismissed as “just part of getting older,” and his questions about treatment options were frequently brushed aside**. Providers assumed he wouldn’t want aggressive rehabilitation, even though he was eager to regain his independence. **The care he received** didn’t reflect his goals—it **reflected the system’s assumptions about what aging means**.



After: Highlighting Expertise

Like many older people, Mr. Jameson is an expert in the realities of ageism in healthcare. **His experience recovering from a stroke showed him how often age-based assumptions shape the care people receive**. Through navigating dismissive attitudes and pushing for the care he knew he needed, **Mr. Jameson** has gained deep insight into how the system needs to change. He **understands that better care starts with listening—and with recognizing that older people, like him, are the best source of knowledge about their own health goals**.

Countering individualism



**Call for systems that treat
everyone with dignity**

DOWN SYNDROME NEVER STOPPED US.
LAW SYNDROME IS HOLDING US BACK.

END **LAW** SYNDROME

TEXT LAW SYNDROME TO 52886



If you're used to telling 'worthiness' stories

Helen worked her entire life — first as a teacher, then as a caregiver for her aging parents. **She paid into Social Security, volunteered in her community, and never asked for help.** Now in her late 70s, she is facing serious health challenges. But when she tried to sign up for in-home care, she was told the waitlist was over a year long. **After a lifetime of contribution, Helen is being denied essential care. People like Helen** shouldn't be left to fend for themselves when they've earned the right to be supported.



Try stories that call for systems that treat everyone with dignity

Helen's story reminds us that **aging with dignity isn't just a matter of poise — it's a matter of public policy.** Now in her late 70s, Helen could age in place with a home health aide and transportation assistance. Instead, she'll need to move to a facility some distance from her home, **due to policy decisions that let critical programs like Medicaid home-care fall into disrepair. By listening to people like Helen, we can build systems that allow us all stay connected to our communities as we age** - and envision a

Countering fatalism



**Offer an inclusive vision for
the future**

Lead with the future

Imagine a world where all bodies — no matter their size or shape — are celebrated and respected. In this world, nobody is treated differently because of their weight, and everyone has what they need to thrive in life. In this world, we focus on health, not appearance, and having a larger body doesn't make people more likely to be bullied or less likely to get hired for a job. In this world, body size doesn't affect whether people get respectful physical and mental health services. In this world, we understand that all bodies are different and that people can be healthy at any size. By working together now to ensure that all bodies are celebrated and respected, we can create a better world for everyone.



Countering otherism



Center lived experience as essential system expertise

Countering individualism



Call for systems that treat everyone with dignity

Countering fatalism



Offer an inclusive vision for the future

Let's chat

Any questions, comments, or other reactions?



Reclaiming the Conversation on Childhood Vaccination: Framing Strategies that Work (Differently)

A 4-Hour Interactive Online Workshop from the FrameWorks Institute

Featuring Julie Sweetland, Katy Evans, and Nico Connolly

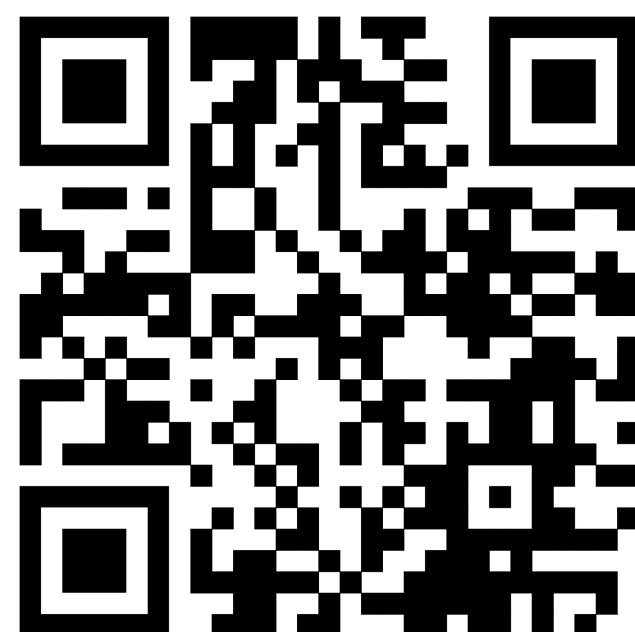
Registration opens in early October

We want to stay connected with you

Join us next time

Health Justice Framing Forum
Wednesday, November 4
1pm ET/10am PT

Subscribe to our new monthly newsletter



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About FrameWorks

The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit think tank that advances the mission-driven sector's capacity to frame the public discourse about social and scientific issues. The organization's signature approach, Strategic Frame Analysis®, offers empirical guidance on what to say, how to say it, and what to leave unsaid. FrameWorks designs, conducts, and publishes multi-method, multidisciplinary framing research to prepare experts and advocates to expand their constituencies, to build public will, and to further public understanding. To make sure this research drives social change, FrameWorks supports partners in reframing, through strategic consultation, campaign design, FrameChecks®, toolkits, online courses, and in-depth learning engagements known as FrameLabs. In 2015, FrameWorks was named one of nine organizations worldwide to receive the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

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