

Responding to Stigma and Explicit or Implicit Bias

Key Points: Experiences of stigma, racism, bias, discrimination, are very real and impactful. It is not effective to dismiss or “restructure” these experiences, or treat them as benign. When bias is possible/likely, it can be helpful to acknowledge the feeling and externalize the meaning.

Acknowledging

It is possible or likely that I am not being treated fairly because of my identity. It makes sense that this is painful for me, and that I have a lot of different emotions about having to deal with additional obstacles. Am I internalizing blame? What can I do to cope and be kind to myself in this unfair situation?

Restructuring (ineffective when due to stigma)

They probably didn't mean to say or do something offensive. I might be mind-reading. It's probably not that bad, I'm blowing it out of proportion. I'm the one with the problem. Other people have been telling me I need to relax and not take things so personally.

Communicating with Friends, Relatives, Others who Lack Information

Key Points: Depending on the situation, it might make sense to take on the role of educating others, even though it is unfair that educating places yet another burden/responsibility on ourselves when we are experiencing pain in the first place. At other times, protecting oneself and deciding to take a step back may be the best course of action to preserve one's emotional resources.

Educating Others

It sounds like you and I are coming at this from different perspectives and experiences. Would you be open to hearing a little about my lived experiences on this topic?

Setting Limits / Walking Away

I am not sure that it will be productive for us to engage in conversation right now. I am going to respect my own limits and step back; thank you for respecting that. (Or, alternatively, walking away without saying anything).

Raising Importance of Social/Cultural Factors with Treatment Providers, Pointing out Assumptions

Key Points: Although they are in the “expert” position, treatment providers may make mistakes, including incorrect assumptions. Pointing this out can be helpful, both to enhance treatment and feel more empowered. A treatment provider's answer to broaching can provide good clues about whether or not they are a good fit for you.

Broaching

It sounds like you are assuming that expressing anger has been a problem for me. Is it ok if I tell you a bit about communication styles in my culture? Expressing anger is actually quite acceptable and expected, so that's not something I'm struggling with right now.

Deferring

I have tried to broach the topic with my therapist, but they do not seem receptive, and/or I am starting to feel unseen/unsafe, and/or I don't feel my therapist can help with my identity related struggles, perhaps they can refer me to someone who can.

Dealing with Guilt (Often Related to Noticing Privilege)

Key points: Guilt is an emotion that typically signals we want to act to correct a past mistake, a potential injustice, or a way in which we might not be living according to our values. It's not always easy to figure how to do this. As a result, we often end up ruminating because it makes us feel like we are doing *something*. It's normal and probably healthy to feel some degree of guilt related to aspects of our identity we experience privilege with, as long as guilt helps motivate us toward action, and doesn't reinforce other negative beliefs or feelings, or lead us to feel stuck or ashamed.

Reflection

On a scale of 1 to 10, how guilty do I feel? What part of this guilt is appropriate and could motivate me for action? What of this guilt is maybe not as helpful, and is leading me to ruminate over things I have no control over?

Committed Action

What can I do move toward my values? Can I read books or talk to others to get more information? Can I volunteer for an organization or donate a resource? What would be a realistic step, in light of my current circumstances?