**Module 2 Part 5 – Stigma and Stereotypes**

*This section corresponds with middle school transition classroom materials for Module 2 Lesson 4.*

**Introduction**

**Objective:** You will learn how to adapt and cope with stigmas and stereotypes associated with students with learning differences by identifying personal strengths and ways to support the understanding of other people concerning learning disabilities.

**Estimated time needed:** 30-45 minutes

**Additional materials needed:**

* Internet access
* Markers or colored pencils
* Printer
* Pencil and paper

[**Introduction**](#Introduction)

[**Learn About It**](#Learn)

**[What Happens When the Label Comes?](#Labelcomes)**

**[How Can the Label Effect the Student?](#Labeleffect)**

**[Ways to Cope with Stigma and Stereotypes](#waystocope)**

**[What Defines You?](#Whatdefinesyou)**

**[Creating a Self-Portrait](#Creating)**

**[Talk About it…. Or Not](#Talkaboutit)**

**[Supporting Others](#Supportingothers)**

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[**Digging Deeper**](#Digging)

**Introductory Video**

*[](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IoM785wN1KM)*



**What Happens When the Label Comes?**

While receiving a diagnosis can be a relief and provide explanation to a student who has difficulty learning in school, the label can also be difficult to bear. In a study that synthesized research over the last thirty years, it was found

* Teachers have lower expectations of students with learning disabilities
* Students distance themselves socially
* Students with the learning disability are embarrassed by the diagnosis
* There are general misunderstanding of what learning disability means

In spite of the perception, teachers seem to treat all students fairly and students respond more to the personality of the student as opposed to the disability.

Click [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FKO_2lrTVw) to watch a video about labels and stigma.

Read more of the *Effects of Labeling Students “Learning Disabled”: Emergent Themes in the Research Literature 1970 Through 2000 at:*

[*http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic Journal Volumes/Osterholm, Karen Effects of Labeling Students Learning Disabled.pdf*](http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Osterholm,%20Karen%20Effects%20of%20Labeling%20Students%20Learning%20Disabled.pdf)

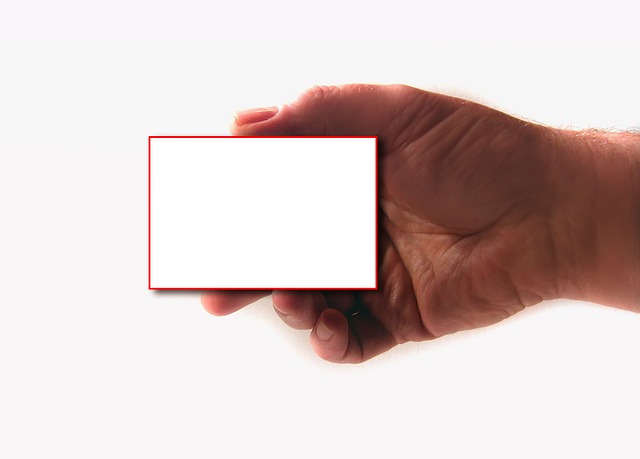
**Parents Chime In**

If you think back to your middle school days, chances are, you remember the teasing and taunting that occurred. Developmentally, middle school aged children have insecurities about their bodies, minds, and changes that are happening to them. Many times this causes them to tease each other in order to draw attention away from themselves. If a child has a learning disability, this adds another dimension to the insecurities and the teasing. Whether or not your child has been the brunt of innocent or malicious teasing is very probable. The purpose of this lesson is to create the foundation of security for your child so that moving forward, he/she has a strong sense of self and the tools to navigate the social aspects of middle school.

**Learn About It**

One of the biggest lies that people believe is that who they are as a person is defined by what others can see. Today we are going to talk about the stigmas and stereotypes of having a learning disability and how to overcome them.

**Label**

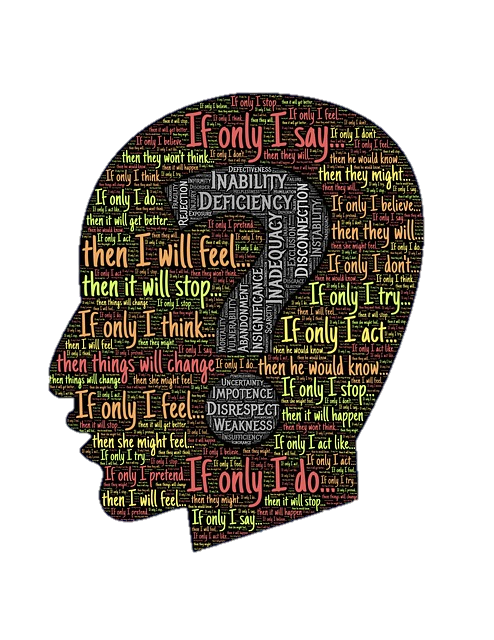


**How Can the Label Effect the Student?**

When students have the label of a learning disability, it is possible for that student to feel certain feelings such as:

* Lower self esteem
* Lower confidence in abilities
* Negative impact on their family
* Added social burden
* Effects their identity

While these feelings can come up, they don’t necessarily have to. You might not have these feelings, and if you don’t it is a good thing! You should keep doing the things that you are doing to keep a healthy and balanced attitude, and you shouldn’t try to fabricate these feelings to fit into the studies. However, if you do relate to these feelings, you need to know that you aren’t alone. There are many other people who feel the same way. Our goal today is going to be to provide you the tools to find a positive and healthy perspective of who you are.



**Ways to Cope with Stigma and Stereotypes**

People encounter stigma and stereotypes for many different reasons. Some of the reasons are visually obvious, but some reasons are not evident without the person with the disability telling others about the disability. This is true of learning disabilities. There are many different ways to cope with stigma of all kinds. You can:

* Stay firmly in your comfort zone
* Conceal your disability at all costs
* Avoid situations that make you uncomfortable
* Support others in understanding your disability

Each of these coping mechanisms have pros and cons. Some of the cons for the first three is that they limit what you can do and keep you in a state of hiding from others. While they may feel safe, they do not allow you to live up to your full potential. For your purpose today, the focus will be learning to support others by first understanding the depth of who you are.

Read more about *Understanding and Coping with the Stigma of Disabilities*

*Web MD* <http://www.webmd.com/epilepsy/features/understanding-stigma-of-disabilities?page=3>

**Parents Chime In**

You know your child well. While, he/she might have transformed during middle school into, well, a middle school student, the attributes that make him/her special are still there. Take the time to have a conversation with your child about his/her special characteristics. You might want to write a letter, draw a picture, or buy a small gift that highlights his/her uniqueness and carve out time for you to talk about this. A parent’s approval is very important at this stage of development even if it doesn’t seem like it is always wanted.



**What Defines You?**

**Stigma and Stereotypes?**

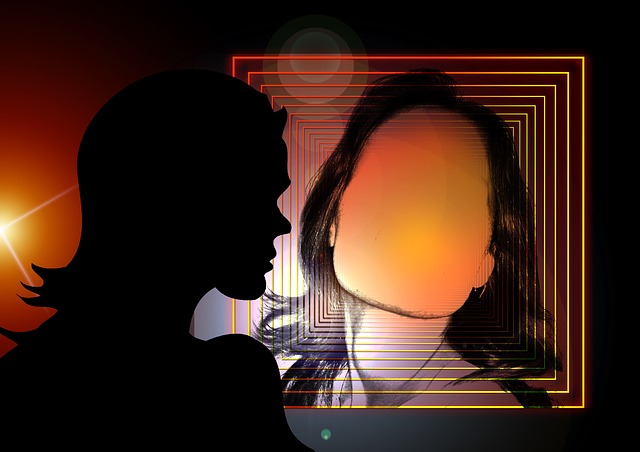
**Or**

**The things that make you, you?**

Before you can begin supporting others, you need to know yourself. You need to understand that you unique and interesting, and the stigma associated with your disability is different from who you are as a person. You have things that you like and dislike. You have things that you love about yourself and things that you don’t think are so great. You have favorite foods, colors, songs, friends, and movies. Your stigma has nothing to do with these things. When you start seeing yourself as a multidimensional person, others will see you this way too, but first you have to be able to identify the things that make you, you. On the flip side, there are parts of you that may need a little work. If you can identify these things and take proactive steps toward improving them, you will have a sense of a plan of action that will give you confidence. This allows you to be in control of how you view yourself instead of dependent on how others see you.

Many people tend to look at the negative aspects or weaknesses in themselves instead of the positive things. Turn this around. Think of the things you do well. Maybe it’s drawing, cooking, athletics, creative thinking, or building. What is it that you do well? What comes naturally and easily? Take the time to focus on these things. This will give you confidence in overcoming the things that are more challenging for you. Success breeds success. When you do something well, it gives you the energy to accomplish the things that are hard.

To read more visit *How to Cope with Stigma* at <http://www.wikihow.com/Cope-With-Stigma>



**Creating a Self-Portrait**

Part of getting to know yourself, is to be intentional about internalizing your strengths. It is one thing to read the paragraphs above, kind of think about what makes you special, and then read the next paragraph below. The challenge for you is to create something that will remind you of who you are.

You have two options for this activity. You can print out the template provided [here](file:///C:\Users\alyshagray\Dropbox\Thesis%20Project\MSM2_body_template_6.20.16.docx) to create your self-portrait or you can design your own from scratch. Regardless of which way you choose, your first job is to **Write or draw four things on your person that you love about yourself!**

**Focus on the Positive**

When you are in negative or stressful situations, your body responds by becoming tense or anxious. In these situations, you have a choice. You can give in to the negative emotions and body responses, but this will compound the issue and make it even worse. The other option is to take control of your mind and bring your body response back to a normal place. Some ways to this are to

* Breathe deeply and slowly.
* Bring to mind a positive moment, place, person, or experience.
* Keep a visual reminder of the positive moment in your pocket, desk, or notebook in order to help you remember. This environmental cue could be a memento, a picture, or even a word to help pull you to this positive memory or experience.

When you are able to think of the good things, your body will respond positively. When you can’t get to that positive experience mentally, your body will continue to respond to the negative stimulus. Being able to maintain mental control also gives you added confidence in your abilities.

**Creating a Self-Portrait**

You are on the next stage of your self-portrait now. You have identified four things that you really like about yourself. Now in the background behind your person **Write two experiences you have had that made you feel great about yourself.** It might be a word or a picture of a time that you had fun with family/friends or felt successful.



**Talk About It…Or Not**

You have protection by the law over who you tell and who you don’t tell about your disability. This is call self-disclosure. It is your choice who you tell and how much you tell them. Of course your teachers and school administration know about your disability, but you can control who you tell and how you tell them. There isn’t a right or a wrong way to talk about your disability, but practicing definitely makes it easier. We will talk about this more on a different day.



**Supporting Others**

*Negative reactions from others can come from discomfort rather than dislike!*

Sometimes people react to disabilities negatively because they just don’t understand them and don’t know how to act. This makes people uncomfortable. When people are uncomfortable, they tend to do and say things that will take the stress out of the situation. There are a many different scenarios that can take place.

* One is that they may ignore the person in general as if they don’t exist.
* Another is that they may stutter or stammer over their words and overcompensate by helping too much or inappropriately.
* Still another is that the uncomfortable person may do or say something rude in order to draw attention away from their discomfort.

Whether the stigma is taking place because of one of these scenarios or a hybrid of them, it is important to learn to support by educating others.



**How to Help Others Feel Comfortable**

**Ask for Help**

It isn’t easy to ask for help. In fact, you may spend most of your time proving that you can do the things that everyone else can do. When you ask for help though, it opens up the door to make the other person feel needed. If the person felt awkward, it gives him/her a sense of relief to know what to do.

**Bring up your Disability First**

If you are able to address your disability quickly, it can get the proverbial “elephant” out of the room. The cards are on the table, and you are setting the tone for the discussion.

**Use Humor if it Fits Your Personality**

If you are comfortable with using humor, make a joke. If possible, keep it lighthearted. You are just trying to show that person that you are not uncomfortable with your disability and he/she doesn’t need to be uncomfortable either.

**Talk About Other Things that Define You**

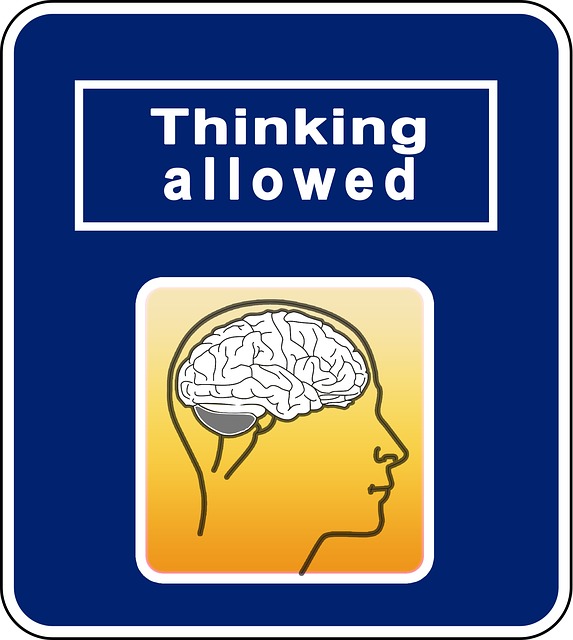
Don’t feel like you have to share everything about your disability. Once the person’s initial curiosity is satisfied, change the topic. This will show the person that you have interests and strengths that go beyond your disability.

**Recognize People Who Don’t Accept Others**

While some people act out of a lack of education, others act out of fear, hate, or insecurity. When you encounter these people, you need to be able to recognize the signs and walk away. You should not continue to put yourself in situations where people will not change or will continue treating you with disrespect. Part of recognizing this gives you freedom to not live under their criticism. The goal is for you to be able to distance yourself from them physically and emotionally because you have other people who care about you, and you know your own strengths.

**Creating a Self-Portrait**

You know yourself better than anyone. Out of the five ways to support others, which one do you think you would actually use the most. Do you have a great sense of humor? Are you good at talking about a lot of different things? Do you think you could ask for help? On the side of your self-portrait **write the way you would most likely support others in learning more about learning disabilities.**



**Your Turn to Practice**

As you read earlier, practicing is the best way to become comfortable in different situations, especially if you are practicing with someone you trust. In this activity, you are going to read different scenarios that could happen, and you will respond to the situation as if it were real life. Find someone who will do it with you and honestly help you speak clearly and become more comfortable. It might be a parent, friend, sibling, or teacher.

[Scenario #1](C:\\Users\\jamesmo\\Downloads\\Scenario 1 .pptx)

[Scenario #2](C:\\Users\\jamesmo\\Downloads\\Scenario 2.pptx)

[Scenario #3](C:\\Users\\jamesmo\\Downloads\\Scenario 3.pptx)

[Scenario #4](C:\\Users\\jamesmo\\Downloads\\Scenario 4.pptx)

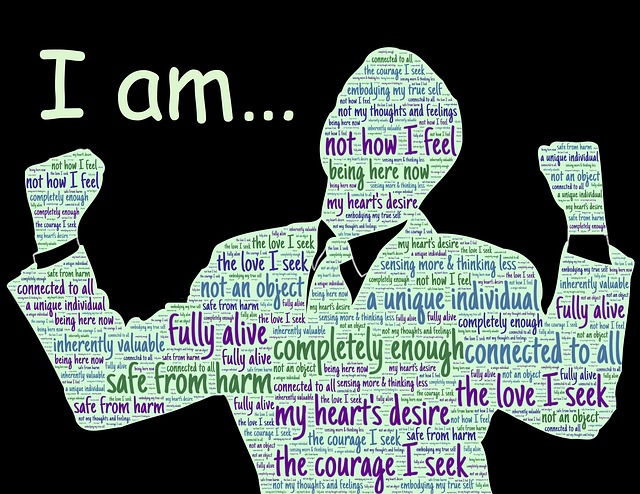
[Scenario #5](C:\\Users\\jamesmo\\Downloads\\Scenario 5.pptx)



**Receiving Additional Help**

Most people at some point in their lives will need outside help. If you find that you can’t distance yourself from the darkness of your stigma, it is important to get help. Some ways to get outside help include

* Visit a counselor or therapist
* Join a support group
* Get help for related conditions.
  + See a specialist
  + Receive tutoring
* Learn to reduce stress
  + Find out what works for you: exercise, yoga, meditation, taking a long walk, reading a book, or even creating art
* Tell your situation and your feelings to a trusted adult.

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**Creating a Self-Portrait**

This is your last step of your self-portrait. Getting outside help if you need it is extremely important! At the bottom of the page, write **how you would receive outside help if you feel like you need it?**

You have finished your self-portrait! Put it somewhere you will see it often. Use it as a reminder of what you love about yourself, memories that bring positive feelings, how you will support others and where you will get outside help if you need it!

**Parents Chime In**

The conversations involving stigma and stereotypes can be difficult. Your child needs to know that he/she has your support and your love. Build your child up regularly by sincerely commenting on gifts and talents he/she possesses. If you notice a change in your child’s behavior, don’t let it slide. It could be a sign that something is going on. Open and honest communication is key to success through middle school and high school. If you haven’t already, start the process now, and don’t be afraid to get outside help if it is needed.

**Wrapping Up**

You have finished your self-portrait! Put it somewhere you will see it often, and use it to remind you

* What you love about yourself
* Memories that bring positive feelings
* How you will support others
* Where you will get outside help if you need it

You are specially made! Your learning disability is a part of who you are, but it isn’t all of you. Be confident in YOU and be successful!

**Have you accomplished today’s objective?**

You will learn how to adapt and cope with stigmas and stereotypes associated with students with learning differences by identifying personal strengths and ways to support the understanding of other people concerning learning disabilities.

*If so, congratulations!*

*If not, review the information on stigma and stereotypes again. Have your parent/guardian review this with you.*

**For More Information…Digging Deeper**

**Personal story: Overcoming the label**

<http://www.acadcom.com/acanews1/anmviewer.asp?a=53>

**Understanding and Coping with Stigma of Disabilities:**

By Robert J Mittan, PhD

**WebMD Feature from “Exceptional Parent” Magazine**

<http://www.webmd.com/epilepsy/features/understanding-stigma-of-disabilities>

**Celebrities with dyslexia**

<http://www.webmd.com/children/guide/detecting-learning-disabilities>

**Ways to cope with stigma**

<http://www.wikihow.com/Cope-With-Stigma>