Reducing Shame and Stigma of COVID-19

Studies show one in four Americans associate shame with COVID-19. They may feel judged by others or themselves if they get sick. They may be stigmatized: labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately and/or experience loss of status because of a perceived link with the disease.

Stigma and shame can make it even more difficult to control the spread of COVID-19. For example, stigma can:

- Deter people from getting tested
- Drive people to hide symptoms or illness to avoid discrimination.
- Prevent people from seeking health care unless their symptoms get worse.
- Make people hesitant to notify others they may have inadvertently exposed them.

As people of faith, we can take steps to reduce the shame and stigma around COVID-19 by:

- Showing empathy for those affected
- Speaking up against negative stereotypes
- Encouraging and modeling mitigation behaviors, such as mask wearing and social distancing
- Condemning harassment and violence toward people who are following public health guidelines
- Offering simple praise, such as "thank you for sharing information about the close contact," or "thank you for wearing a mask."

According to Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health: "It's important for us to be there for one another and have grace and empathy. If a close contact tells you that you may have inadvertently been exposed, thank them. Let them know you appreciate their honesty, bravery, and desire to watch out for others. Then, follow CDC guidance for quarantine."

Sources: unicef, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, CDC, World Health Organization

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