



BREAK THE STIGMA OF HEARING LOSS

FACT SHEET

If you find yourself struggling with stigma from others or with self-stigma, there are things you can do.

Stigma occurs when we respond negatively towards someone. Specifically, this negative reaction happens because of a particular characteristic or trait that we think they have. We perceive this characteristic or trait to be a disadvantage. These sorts of beliefs are often built over a lifetime, and are often held unconsciously. People with disabilities can experience this sort of stigma because they are seen as 'blemished' or 'broken', and that doesn't align with the 'able-bodied' ideology that is prevalent in many societies. People with hearing conditions can also experience stigma related to ageism. Ageism is prejudice against old age. Hearing loss and hearing aids are often culturally connected with old age and a weakening of ability. So having a hearing loss can mean a person is hit with a double whammy of two stigmatised identities, related to both disability and ageing. It's no wonder many people are reluctant to admit that their hearing is causing them difficulties, and put off seeking help for far too long. Like anything that signals that we may be different, we may be nervous about revealing this characteristic for fear of being discriminated against or judged unfairly. We may even be apprehensive about acknowledging it to ourselves. This is normal, but unfortunately, hiding is a process that just increases the stigma, making it a difficult cycle to break.

Stigma can be directed inward – called self-stigma. You may be directing negative views about hearing loss and/or ageing at yourself or avoiding getting help with your hearing because of self-stigma. The first thing you can do is to appreciate that stigma is a social phenomenon. Stigma doesn't reside in one individual – it's about how people relate to one another, and it involves labelling, discrimination and loss of status. It is not YOUR problem, in that sense, it's society's problem. You might not be able to change society's views all on your own, but you can start with you. Building connections with people who don't hold stigmatised views towards hearing conditions can help. It can be very empowering to be able to talk with people whose experience is a bit like yours. Stigmatising views about hearing conditions are not universal, and if that's true, then it's possible for you to let go of those beliefs yourself.

Another step you can take towards overcoming self-stigma is to take the plunge and get your hearing tested. Getting a hearing test means starting the journey towards treating your hearing condition, proving to yourself that your hearing is something to be valued and prioritised. Discuss it with your audiologist or doctor, tell others that you are having some hearing difficulties, instead of concealing it which only enhances those feelings of shame inadequacy.

ADDRESS

1 Hamilton Place
Mount Waverley
Vic 3149

HEARING LINE

1300 242 842

For hearing, social & emotional support, & general enquiries, Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm

LET'S CONNECT



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My identity, as a person with hearing loss is, I hope, it's not all that I am. I am also a daughter, a mother, a partner, a dancer, I have a career, I love dogs... I am many things – Tracey

OTHER WAYS OF OVERCOMING STIGMA

Asserting yourself when you experience stigma from others. Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself and educate others. This takes courage, and it might help to read stories from others who have walked this path to help you to develop the right attitude.

Keep a positive attitude and a sense of humour. Reframe stigma as 'their problem, not yours'. If others want to feel differently about you since you have a hearing loss that is their problem, not yours. Again, this takes courage and practice to change your thinking.

Turn it to your advantage. Perhaps you now understand what it feels like to experience discrimination or feelings of being stigmatised, and this may help you to support others in your various roles in life – at work, at home, in the community. Allow your experience to empower you, rather than knock you down.

Share first-hand experiences with others and, if possible, include your support network in your hearing healthcare journey. Since stigma is a social problem, and hearing conditions impact on family members as well as the individual with the hearing condition, then it makes sense to include family members in the hearing healthcare journey. This reinforces the idea that you are not alone, that the support is there, and that your hearing and therefore your ability to communicate with others is valued.

One of the best things you can do to try and challenge your own thinking and overcome self-stigma is to listen to some real stories from others with lived experience and learn from them. You may not relate to all of these stories, but you may just find one that resonates with you and helps you to develop the right mindset to take the leap towards better hearing healthcare: soundfair.org.au/category/social-connection/ or [watch youtube.com/playlist?list=PLksXpZO2g4zVScaWFEZdbn_pTRtL17s-j](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLksXpZO2g4zVScaWFEZdbn_pTRtL17s-j)

This factsheet is intended to be a guide of a general nature, having regard to general circumstances. The information presented should not be relied on as a substitute for medical advice, independent judgement or assessment by a healthcare professional, with consideration of the particular needs and individual circumstances. This factsheet reflects information available at the time of its preparation, but its currency should be determined having regard to other available information. Soundfair disclaims all liability to users of the information provided.

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