Understanding Stigma: What It Actually Is and How We End It

Presented by Thrive Education · Facilitated by Jenny Thrasher or a Thrive Education certified trainer

Length	45 minutes + 15 minutes of Q&A (90-minute version available)
Audience	Any group size, ages 12 and up
Format	In person, virtual or hybrid
Builds on	Can be taken on its own. Pairs naturally with Thrive 101 and Safe Language 101.

Presenter

Jenny Thrasher, Founder, Thrive Education · U.S. Lead Ambassador, Second Aid

Jenny Thrasher is a mental health educator, suicide prevention advocate, author, and creator of Thrive Education, an integrative approach that combines evidence-based research, lived experience, and practical tools to reduce the risk of crisis and help people thrive every day.

For more than two decades, Jenny's work has been shaped by both professional and personal experience, beginning with the loss of her father to suicide, continuing through her own physical, mental, and emotional challenges, and ultimately helping her daughter shift from suicidal to thriving.

Session Description

People are talking about mental health and suicide more than ever before, and yet the stigma persists. That's because it isn't how often we talk about mental health and suicide, it's *how* we talk about them. In this session, participants uncover what the stigma actually is, why suicide isn't a choice, and how simple shifts in our language and responses ease the pain and uncertainty that amplify grief. Everyone leaves with a clear understanding of the stigma and the words to help end it, at work, at home and with the people they love.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

1. **Identify** the actual stigma surrounding mental health and suicide, and explain why shame is the result of the stigma, and why suicide is not a choice.
2. **Replace** stigmatic language with intentional language when talking about mental health challenges, suicide attempts and a loss to suicide.

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3. **Describe** how ending the stigma changes the way we respond to someone who is struggling, has attempted suicide or is grieving a loss to suicide, and practice responding rather than reacting.

What Participants Walk Away With

- A simple, clear definition of the actual stigma
- A side-by-side list of stigmatic and intentional language they can use the same day
- Age-appropriate ways to talk about mental health and suicide with children
- The Actual Stigma and Safe Language take-home guides

Curriculum Content

The three parts follow Jenny's three steps to ending the stigma: identify it, improve our language, and respond rather than react.

SEGMENT	LEARNING OBJECTIVE	MINUTES
Welcome: why the stigma persists	1	5
Part 1: Identify the actual stigma	1	15
Part 2: Improve our language	2	12
Part 3: Respond rather than react	3	10
Simple answers recap and resources	All	3
Q&A	All	15
Total		**60**

Peer-Reviewed Research References

- Walsh, D., & Foster, J. (2024). Understanding the public stigma of mental illness: A mixed-methods, multi-level, exploratory triangulation study. *BMC Psychology, 12*, Article 403. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-01887-3
- Wyllie, J. M., Robb, K. A., Sandford, D., Etherson, M. E., Belkadi, N., & O'Connor, R. C. (2025). Suicide-related stigma and its relationship with help-seeking, mental health, suicidality and grief: Scoping review. *BJPsych Open, 11*(2), e60. https://doi.org/10.1192/bjo.2024.857
- Wyllie, J. M., Robb, K. A., Belkadi, N., & O'Connor, R. C. (2025). "I still think there's like a huge stigma": Understanding suicide-related stigma among those with lived experiences. *Death Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2025.2556106

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Books

No books are required for this session. Jenny is the author of *Growing Through Grief: A Guide to Healing After Losing a Loved One to Suicide* and is happy to donate copies for events.

Evaluation (for CE credit)

- A short quiz on the three learning objectives (minimum passing score 80%)
- A course evaluation form: were the objectives met, how relevant and usable the content was, how effective the teaching was, and ideas for improvement
- Certificates of completion are issued once both are complete

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