

Stigma: At the root of ostracism and bullying

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Increasing evidence shows that stigma – whether due to a child's weight, sexual orientation, race, income or other attribute—is at the root of bullying, and that it can cause considerable harm to a child's mental health.

Experts in pediatric [mental health](#), bullying and [ostracism](#) will gather May 5 for a symposium titled "Stigma, Ostracism and Bullying: Dangers, Prevention and Interventions" at the Pediatric Academic Societies Annual Meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia. Researchers will present evidence of stigma associated with various attributes and the harm it poses to children through bullying, ostracism, and discrimination.

Stigmatization is linked to depression, anxiety disorders, aggressive behavior and lower quality of life. Stigma marks certain individuals as less worthy than others, marginalizes them, and impedes their access to needed educational and health services.

"Stigma reflects a tendency to overlook and devalue differences among people, and thus keeps us from appreciating our diversity," said symposium chair Ellen C. Perrin, MD, professor of pediatrics at the Floating Hospital for Children at Tufts Medical Center. "Stigma leads to small and large acts of aggression or social exclusion of people with characteristics that society defines as undesirable. Whether this manifests as physical aggression, ostracism or electronic bullying, it causes measurable damage to children's self-esteem, mental and physical health."

In the symposium, speakers will present evidence of the harm stigma causes to children and families, using data about specific stigmatized conditions. The symposium will conclude with a summary of recent attempts to overcome [stigma](#) and bullying.

The symposium will run from 8 to 10 a.m. in the Vancouver Convention Centre. Topics and presenters include:

- "Definitions and Concepts," presented by Ellen C. Perrin, Floating Hospital for Children, Tufts Medical Center, Boston
- "Discrimination and Stigmatization of Children of Color," presented by Adiaha Spinks-Franklin, Texas Children's Hospital/Baylor College of Medicine, Houston
- "Discrimination and Stigmatization of Children Who Are Overweight or Obese," presented by Eliana M. Perrin, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- "Discrimination and Stigmatization of Children with Developmental-Behavioral Disabilities," presented by Conway F. Saylor, The Citadel, Charleston, SC
- "Discrimination and Stigmatization of Non-heterosexual Children and Youth" presented by Mark L. Hatzenbuehler, Columbia University, New York, NY
- "Possibilities and Programs to Prevent Stigma, Ostracism, and Bullying," presented by Joseph L. Wright, Children's National Medical Center, Washington DC.

"The exposure of all children to the effects of bullying as a victim, perpetrator or bystander is pervasive and needs to be fully appreciated and addressed," said Joseph L. Wright, MD, MPH, senior vice president at Children's National Medical Center and immediate past chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Violence Prevention Subcommittee. "While we are still gaining a complete scientific understanding of the depth of the health and behavioral health consequences of [bullying](#)

behavior, for the sake of our [children](#), we simply can no longer afford to accept or tolerate its presence in our society."

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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