

Revised May 2020

LORETO CONVENT SCHOOL



COVID-19 ANTI-STIGMA POLICY - LORETO CONVENT SCHOOL

DEFINITION AND PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

Learners testing positive or who shows symptoms, even if not related to Covid-19, are most likely to be subjected to stigmatization. By extension, friends and family of such a learner may be stigmatized as well. A learner may also be stigmatized because of a friend of family member who showed symptoms, or tested positive for Covid-19.

Stigmatization due to Covid-19 may lead to a learner being socially isolated, as learners are not willing to identify with an already labelled learner. This may lead to the learner in question to develop psychosocial problems and other stress related pathology. In severe cases, bullying can be a further consequence of stigmatization.

The use of various social media platforms also poses a further risk as learners discuss each other, raise their fears and concerns, and ask questions to which they receive inaccurate answers.

THE EFFECT OF STIGMATIZATION ON THE SCHOOL LEARNER

Stigmatization will lead to a learner to experience anxiety, fear and worry. It may lead to a negative social distancing resulting in total isolation. Even friends, because of peer pressure, might distance themselves from this learner. Since the learner is now isolated, the learner, who is now labelled, will not have the courage to get the help and support he/she desperately needs to address any fears, questions and concerns.

As the learner's withdrawal is noticed more by fellow learners, their behaviour might enforce the withdrawal behaviour further, which may be in the form of bullying, whether direct or through social media. At this point the learner might move into total and critical self-isolation which can result in more severe psychosocial and / or stress related pathology.

Another area of concern is the academic performance of the learner. Stress, anxiety and fear as a result of stigmatization will most certainly lead to poor academic performance.

SOLUTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Loreto Convent School is fortunate to have a social worker and psychologist on staff who are able to support and guide learners through the challenges that are brought by Covid-19. Should further assistance be needed, the Department of Social Development will be contacted as well as other social welfare organisations, depending on demarcation and the nature of the problem presented.

The following is important for implementation:

- Counselling and educating the learners regarding Covid-19 is vital. Myths and stereotypes should be addressed and facts should be presented in a positive and age appropriate way.
- Currently Covid-19 is part of the bigger picture of everyone and everything. Focus needs to be on possibilities, that which is positive, solutions and age appropriate education regarding Covid-19.
- The correct counselling and support to learners, plays a critical role in helping them to overcome any challenge they experience. It needs to be combined with respect, age appropriate information and encouragement.
- Support needs to be without any judgement. Judgement is often the result of upbringing and reinforced by society. Therefore, staff needs to be aware of their own behaviour and attitudes to ensure efficient support to learners.
- High risk learners (learners looking after the sick, learners at risk of abuse etc.) need to be identified and counselled in accordance to existing counselling and reporting procedures.

CONCLUSION

The best interest of the learners of Loreto Convent School is of utmost importance. It is clear that Covid-19 poses a real threat to the psychosocial well-being to our learners. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the school to ensure the safety and well-being of our learners as far as possible. This will be achieved through proper identification, support and education of our learners.