

When I was in High School

Facilitator's Guide

This video is intended for teens in grades nine through 12. A follow-up discussion to explore myths, share experiences and provide information is encouraged. To accommodate this discussion, it is recommended the video be shown in a small group or classroom setting rather than in an assembly or large group.

Objectives

- Help teens recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness in themselves and others
- Decrease the social stigma associated with mental illness
- Promote the importance of seeking help for oneself, a friend, or family member

Mental illness responds to treatment just like any other medical illness but it is estimated that ***only 1 in 3 adolescents who suffer with a mental disorder seeks treatment.***

Background information

Definitions

Mental Health – is an ideal everyone strives for. It is a balance of mental, emotional, physical, social and spiritual health.

Mental Illness – is a serious disturbance in thoughts, feelings and perceptions severe enough to affect day-to-day functioning.

Types of common mental health disorders

Anxiety Disorder – panic attacks, phobias, obsessions or post-traumatic stress disorder

Depression – intense feelings of sadness, worthlessness, hopelessness – so bad that a person loses interest in life

Bipolar Disorder – Cycles of feeling intensely happy and invincible followed by periods of intense sadness or depression

Schizophrenia – seeing, smelling or hearing things that are not there and/or believing things that are not true or make no sense to others

Eating Disorders – anorexia (not eating), bulimia (binging then purging)

Borderline Personality Disorder – severe difficulty with relationships; putting oneself in danger, making decisions that are harmful for one's well-being, often as a result of a history of child abuse, abandonment or neglect

Warning signs of a mental disorder

Symptoms of mental disorders vary depending on the type and severity of the condition. Some symptoms are difficult to distinguish from the short-lived mood variances of normal adolescent growth and development. In general, mental illness is most likely to be present when:

- There is a clear change in the teen’s normal mood or behavior
- The symptoms last over a period of time, at least two weeks
- The symptoms are observed in several contexts: home, school, work, friends, and social events

Some general symptoms that **may** suggest a mental illness in teens include:

- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Changes in school performance or failing grades
- Inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Excessive complaints of physical problems
- Defying authority, skipping school, stealing or damaging property
- Intense fear of gaining weight
- Long-lasting negative mood, often along with poor appetite and thoughts of death
- Frequent outbursts of anger
- Excessive fear, worry or anxiety
- Social withdrawal - loss of interest in friends or activities
- Delusions or hallucinations
- Difficulty concentrating or poor memory
- Bleak sense about the future (hopelessness)
- Feels like a failure or disappointment to others
- Self-harm behaviours such as cutting, burning, scratching
- Thinking about suicide or making a suicide plan

Famous people with mental illnesses

Michael Phelps – ADHD	Kurt Cobain – ADD, Bipolar Disorder
Jim Carrey – Depression	Robin Williams – Bipolar Disorder
Britney Spears – Bipolar Disorder	Heath Ledger- Depression, Anxiety
Halle Berry – Depression, Suicidal	Lady Diana- Bulimia
Mike Tyson – Depression	DMX – Bipolar
Amy Winehouse- Bipolar disorder	Demi Lovato – Bipolar Disorder
Drew Barrymore- Depression	J.K. Rowling – Depression, Suicidal
Catherine Zeta-Jones- Bipolar	Angelina Jolie- Depression, Self-harm

Antidepressants and Teens

Antidepressant medications are formulated to reset the brain chemistry in people with depression. For many people they really do help them to go back to feeling like themselves.

Improvements often are seen in sleep, appetite, and mood. They may also feel more energetic, talkative, and gain renewed interest in what is happening around them.

However, in a small percentage of adolescents, antidepressant use may be accompanied by increased suicidal thoughts or behavior. Teens are encouraged to see their doctor frequently while taking antidepressants, especially when first prescribed, and communicate any side effects to him/her. The doctor can adjust the medication or dosage to make sure the prescription is effective and side effects can be kept under control.

Overall, studies show that getting early treatment for depression can stop the symptoms from becoming severe and long-lasting, lessen the risk of recurrence, and reduce the risk of suicide. In summary, the benefits of antidepressants generally outweigh any associated risks, but good communication and frequent monitoring by a physician is crucial.

Suggested lesson plan

Invite a guest facilitator

If you anticipate being uncomfortable handling questions that might arise, consider inviting a health professional to help guide the post-video discussion. Your school nurse is an excellent resource. She has up-to-date information about mental illness and can assist students who may need follow-up or referrals after the discussion. She can also arrange speakers from **T.A.M.I.** (Talking about Mental Illness) to accompany the video presentation. **T.A.M.I.** speakers provide a real-life perspective to the discussion, as they personally deal with mental illness in their daily lives.

Introduce the video

- Keep it brief
- ‘Normalize’ mental disorders by pointing out ‘famous people’ with mental illness
- Introduce any resource people in attendance and explain why they are there

Sample introduction: “Today we will be talking about mental illness. Mental illness can happen to anyone. The disorders don’t care if you’re young, old, rich or poor. We often hear of famous people with mental illnesses. Can you name some of them? ... We will now watch a short video about mental illness. When the video is over, we will have a chance to talk about what we’ve seen and the messages we can draw from the actors’ experiences. Please welcome ... (school nurse, TAMI etc.) They are here to assist with any questions you may have about mental illness.”

View video

Pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues of the audience during the video and subsequent discussion. They are often important indicators of students who may need additional support or follow-up after the session is over.

Post–video sample discussion questions

- When first introduced to the actors, would you have recognized them as having a mental illness? Why? Why not?
- How can you tell if someone has a mental illness?
- What does the video say about the causes of mental illness?
- People often feel isolated and find it difficult to share concerns about their own mental health with others – even friends and family. Why?
- Do you think it is hard for a teen to ask for help if they are worried about their mental health?
- What kinds of language do people use to describe mental illness? (i.e. psycho, crazy, loony, etc.)
- Do you think this type of language would prevent someone from getting help if they needed it?
- How would you go about helping a friend you were concerned about?
- What if they refused to get help?
- What do you think the students mean on the video at the end, when they say “I was one of the lucky ones?” Discussion: they are lucky to have recognized they had a problem or symptoms and did receive treatment at a young age. It does not mean they are the exception, because we know that most mental illness responds well to treatment, and enables people to live a healthy and happy life.
- Can a teen get help without telling their parents?
- If someone is diagnosed with a mental illness, who needs to know about it?
- Sometimes people with mental illnesses think that alcohol / marijuana makes them feel better. Have you heard this? What do you think about this?
- In what ways did the video affect your attitude towards mental illness?

Wrap-up

- While everyone feels sad, anxious or discouraged at times, most people bounce back pretty quickly. Some people, however, can’t shake these negative feelings and as time goes on their symptoms worsen.
- Like illnesses with a ‘physical cause,’ mental illnesses often don’t go away on their own. Treatments are available and they work. Eighty percent of people with depression, for example, can be successfully treated.
- If you are concerned about yourself, a friend, or family member, speak to a trusted adult about getting help. Your school nurse, child and youth worker, or doctor is a good place to start.

Additional strategies to promote mental health in your schools:

Mental Health First Aid training

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is the help provided to a person developing a

mental health problem, or experiencing a mental health crisis. Just as physical first aid is administered to an injured person before medical treatment can be obtained, MHFA is given until appropriate treatment is found or until the crisis is resolved. For more information, or to register for a course, please visit www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca

SafeTALK

safeTALK, about three hours in duration, is a training that prepares anyone over the age of 15 to identify persons with thoughts of suicide and connect them to suicide first aid resources. Most people with thoughts of suicide invite help to stay safe. Alert helpers know how to use these opportunities to support that desire for safety. For more information, or to register for a workshop, please visit www.livingworks.net

Applied Suicide Intervention Training (ASIST) training

This two day workshop is for people who want to feel more comfortable, confident and competent in helping to prevent the immediate risk of suicide. Small group discussions and skills development take place that are based upon adult learning principles. For more information, or to register for a workshop, please visit www.livingworks.net

Dare to Dream grant

Dare to Dream is a youth-led funding program that helps young people create and implement project ideas that promote mental health and well-being. Young people work with adult mentors to bring their project ideas to life! Grants are awarded for up to \$5000. Applications / previous project ideas can be found at www.daretodreamprogram.ca . Application deadlines are in October and March.

Other classroom resources

'More Than Sad' video & facilitator's guide

This 26 minute film aims to help teens recognize depression and to seek help. Video can be borrowed from your school nurse.

T.A.M.I. (Talking About Mental Illness) presentation

T.A.M.I. is an informative presentation by professional facilitators and people who have experienced mental illness. Their goal is to bring about positive change in young people's knowledge about mental health, and to reduce the stigma that surrounds mental illness. For more information or to book a presentation please call 905-384-9551, ext. 231 or visit <http://www.pathstonementalhealth.ca/tami>

Helpful websites:

www.cmha.ca

www.camh.ca

www.mindyourmind.ca

www.teenmentalhealth.org

www.youthsuicide.ca

www.beautifulminds.ca

www.pathstonementalhealth.ca