

Experiences of Mental Illness and the Importance of Family Communication

Overview

In this module students will hear directly from other young people about their personal experiences with mental illness. In their own words, a number of young people describe their symptoms, the difficulties they went through as a result of their illness, and how the illness affected their lives at school, within their families, and in their friendships.

Students will work together in small groups to explore the impact of mental illnesses on the lives of the young people in the video. Students will also be introduced to two resources: “How Do I Teen My Parent?” and “How Do I Parent My Teen?”

Learning Objectives

In this lesson students will learn to:

- Understand on personal level the way mental illnesses can impact a person’s life
- Appreciate the importance of getting help and proper treatment for a mental illness
- Stress the importance of positive communications between parents and teens

Major Concepts Addressed

- Mental illnesses are diseases that affect many aspects of a person’s life.
- While they are usually lifelong, mental illnesses are often episodic and most people can function well in everyday life with effective treatment.
- Young people can better understand and communicate with parents and vice-versa.

Teacher Background and Preparation

Teachers should preview Module 4 materials and each of the six video stories. Reviewing the videos in advance will help you become familiar with the content so that you can then help students understand how a mental illness has affected the lives of these youth.

The materials are located on:

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/curriculum/modules/module-4/>

The password is: **t33nh3alth**

Activities

- Activity 1: Video Discussion Sheet (30 min.)
- Activity 2: Teens and Parents (15 min.)

MODULE 4

Preparation

In Advance

- Decide whether you will show the videos to the class as a whole (and if so which videos you will show) or if you want smaller groups to view the videos through the web-based format
- Set up computer work stations
- Photocopy Activity 1 Video discussion sheet (1 copy of each per student)
- Locate the “How Do I Teen My Parent?” and “How do I Parent My Teen?” resources
- If you will be handing out the “How Do I Teen My Parent?” resource you will need to copy the PDF from the website (www.teenmentalhealth.org/product/teen-parent/)

Materials Required

- Web-based videos
- Handout: Activity 1 Video discussion sheet (this is also found in the Resource Appendix)
- Handout of “How Do I Teen My Parent?” (photocopy this from www.teenmentalhealth.org/product/teen-parent/ or direct students to it).

Key Message

The key message around suicide is this: suicidal thoughts mean that help is needed. Young people who are having suicidal thoughts need to reach out to a responsible adult who can get them the help that they need.

Useful Self-Education

Hot Idea or Hot Air: A Systematic Review of Evidence for Two Widely Marketed Youth Suicide Prevention Programs and Recommendations for Implementation.

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26336375

Five Communication Tips for Dealing with Parent-Teen Conflict

<http://www.comservice.bc.ca/sites/default/files/files/YFCI%20SR%20Communication%20and%20Power%20Struggles.pdf>

How to Talk with Your Teen about Drugs - Communication Tips for Parents

www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/health-concerns/reports-publications/alcohol-drug-prevention/talk-your-teen-about-drugs-communication-tips-parents.html

Video Discussion Sheet (30 minutes)

Purpose:

- To explore the impact of mental illnesses on a young person.
- To look specifically at the experience of each character in the video through small group work.

How-to:

- 1) Inform the class that the videos they are about to see were created by young people who have experienced mental illness, and that they are about their experiences.

Before showing the videos, divide the class into groups and distribute the video activity sheet. Allocate each group one of the videos. Give the students a few minutes to read through the questions on the video discussion sheet. Explain that each group will focus specifically on one video.

- 2) Each group should play their video.
- 3) While in their small groups and after watching the video, have each group member complete their discussion sheet. After everyone has completed their own discussion sheet ask each group to talk about what they have written and to create a single group discussion sheet that one of the group members will then share with the class as a whole.
- 4) Bring the groups back together and ask a member of each group to summarize the discussion from each of the small groups for the class.

Discussion of the video may raise the issue of youth suicide. While this discussion is appropriate within the broader context of mental illness, it is important that the discussion not become focused on suicide. Any discussion of suicide should:

- *avoid portraying suicide as romantic, heroic or tragic;*
- *avoid increasing knowledge about methods of suicide;*
- *emphasize the importance of seeking help and of everyone's responsibility to tell a trusted adult if a friend mentions thoughts of suicide, even if that person asks for it to be kept a secret.*

Suicidal Thoughts

Thoughts about suicide are common in adolescents. However, persistent or recurring thoughts about suicide signal that help is needed. It is useful to make sure your students understand that persistent or recurring thoughts about suicide is a signal to them that they need some extra help, and if they are experiencing this they should talk to the school counsellor.

MODULE 4

Activity #1

The most important concept for students to grasp through the class discussion is that although the individuals in the videos had different mental illnesses and different experiences, there are some common themes and concerns for each person. Prompt students to think about the similarities among the individuals that arise in the videos.

- 5) Using the questions below, facilitate a discussion with the whole class:
 - a) What specific illnesses were mentioned in the videos?
 - b) What help or treatment did the people receive?
 - c) Did the people recover?
 - d) What did they find helpful to help them recover?
- 6) Conclude the activity by addressing any questions that students may have after watching the videos.

In Class Personal Contacts

Some schools have organizations (such as the Canadian Mental Health Organization or Laing House) that have trained and professionally supported youth speakers that can provide personal experiences about their mental disorder. If such a resource is available in your community, this module provides an excellent opportunity to take advantage of that. If that is the case, you can substitute the speaker for the videos. Make sure that a reputable organization is sponsoring the speaker, the youth speaking has received training and that psychological supports are available to the speaker. Do not invite speakers who do not meet all three criteria. Speakers should not focus on self-harm, suicide or eating disorders.

Video Discussion Sheet

What are some of the symptoms of the illness that are described?

How did the illness affect the person?

Did the illness cause the person difficulty in their life? In what ways?

What kind of treatment did the person get?

What kinds of things have helped the person recover and stay well?

What questions would you like to ask the person in the video in order to better understand their experience with their illness?

MODULE 4

Activity #2

Teens and Parents (15 minutes)

In many cases, parents can be an important and needed support for teens. In some cases, this may not be possible, but there may be another trusted adult in a teen's life who can provide support. The relationship between a teen and a parent/parents or between a teen and a trusted adult can be challenging. To help teens and parents/other adults understand each other, the "How Do I Teen My Parent?" and "How Do I Parent My Teen?" resources may help.

Purpose:

- To make teens aware of these resources.
- To stress the importance of positive communications between parents and teens.

How-to:

- 1) Distribute or show the Teening My Parent and Parenting My Teen resources to students.
- 2) Allow 10 minutes of class time for students to review the resource.
- 3) Have the students write down one new piece of information that they learned from reading the resource to hand in as an in-class assignment. Review when class ends.
- 4) Encourage them to share the Parenting My Teen resource with their parent/parents or another trusted adult.