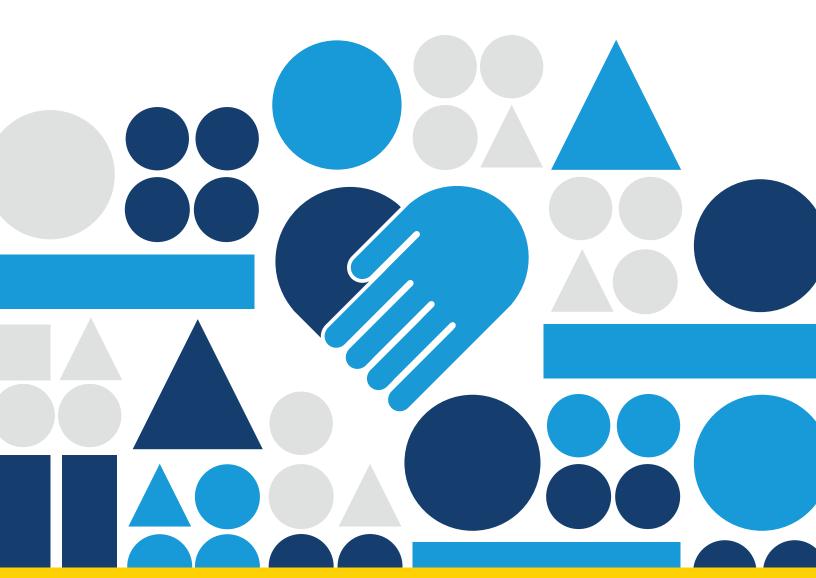


A TOOLKIT FOR YOUTH-SERVING PROFESSIONALS

Expressive Approaches to Social-Emotional Wellness





The Pediatric Mental Health Institute (PMHI) at Children's Hospital Colorado (Children's Colorado) has listened to community feedback:

Mental health is a top concern for youth and families, as identified in the Children's Hospital Colorado Community Health Needs Assessment, as well as assessments conducted by numerous other hospitals, local public health departments and community-based organizations.

In looking for ways to address mental health education and de-stigmatization, we reviewed existing programs targeting stigma reduction among youth (Appendix H) and turned to the work of our Mental Health Youth Action Board (YAB). The YAB was created in 2013 to generate social action around mental health. Each year, a group of 15 teens from across the Denver metro area create an arts-based project to share with the community to help increase conversations regarding the spectrum of mental and emotional experiences. We have transformed the YAB projects into a toolkit that can be used with groups of youth in the community by teachers, youth program leaders and other youth-serving professionals.

Two of the YAB's goals directly address Children's Hospital Colorado's desire to serve the community in these ways:

Raise the awareness of child and adolescent mental health issues in the communities we serve by creating a project each year that will support social change.

2 Develop the leadership and advocacy skills of our youth.

With this toolkit, we hope to share with you a version of the projects, which we have come to refer to as "actions." The actions represent the work done by the YAB and brought forth to the public. We have found them to be impactful for the YAB members who created them, and feedback tells us they are impactful in our communities as well.

LEAD AUTHORS

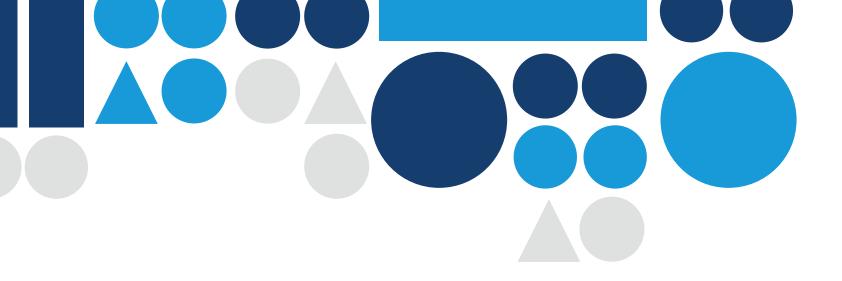
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The Actions

The actions in this toolkit are intended to touch on two goals:

- 1 To normalize conversations about mental wellness. If we are going to be effective at minimizing the harm done by mental illness to individuals and communities, we need to have working language for what makes us healthy. The language we have inherited is often dismissive or shaming of individuals experiencing emotional distress or behavioral challenges and those with cognitive impairments. We can challenge this antiquated language in ways that are proactive, positive and engaging.
- 2 To practice the self-expression and listening that these conversations require, knowledge of facts around mental wellness is only half the equation. We need to be willing and effective as people who express and as people who listen. The ability to self-express, tolerate functional levels of vulnerability and listen effectively to others is not merely a "checklist of skills." Relationship requires practice, as does finding one's authentic voice.

Note: These actions are designed to stimulate thought, action and interaction around mental wellness in ways that are structured and contained. Rather than trying to discuss mental illness diagnoses, this toolkit takes a strength-based perspective. It encourages the openness, willingness and vulnerability that discussing mental health requires. If we can practice teaching relational skills and fostering self-expression, youth experiencing mental health challenges will have tools for expressing and listening.

Key Definitions

Mental health

This phrase has more than one meaning. Generally mental health refers to one's degree of emotional and cognitive well-being and ability to cope with everyday demands. "Mental health" also refers to the therapeutic professions that address the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders. Because of this broad range of meanings, we minimize its use in this toolkit.

Mental illness

This refers to various disorders where an individual's thoughts, emotions or social functioning are impaired. Mental illnesses are treated by professionals within the mental health field, and education about mental illness is not the goal of this toolkit. We encourage adults who work with youth to enroll in a Youth Mental Health First Aid course, which introduces the most common mental illnesses, how to recognize warning signs and how to support youth with mental health challenges.

Mental wellness

Like the more general definition of "mental health," mental wellness refers to the practices that support, encourage and reinforce emotional, social and cognitive well-being. We use this phrase more often in this toolkit, as it reflects that psychological, social and cognitive well-being are states of being in which we all engage.

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to thrive, adapt and cope in the face of tough, stressful situations. Resilience can counteract stress by reducing the impact of that stress. It is a skill that can be learned, taught and practiced. The exercises in this toolkit are intended to engage youth in practicing resilience skills.

Role of Adult Facilitator

Adults can serve youth through at least three primary roles.

- Facilitator: you guide and support youth in ways that help to draw out their experience and expertise.
- Mentor: you get to know participants on a personal level, learn their goals and coach them in developing the skills and attitudes needed to fulfill those goals. You also model behaviors, approaches and attitudes in every aspect of your work with youth.
- Partner: you are invested in the outcomes for youth and the program, and use your strengths and capacities and encourage youth to contribute their strengths and capacities as well.

To foster the growth of young advocates, we have found a few skills to be invaluable, skills that we would like to see in anyone facilitating discussions of mental health and illness. These skills are most effective when they are modeled rather than only taught.

- Develop knowledge, attitudes and skills around mental wellness. Get your own guestions answered. When it comes to mental wellness, be more curious than afraid. Be hungry for the facts. Be open to the different ways those facts play out in individual cases. Know what mental health supports are available to you as a group leader, and where your comfort level is with hearing about others' emotional challenges. Who are your supports if a youth confides troubling information?
- Create a context of safety. Often, the "shutdown" around discussing mental wellness issues is sensible. If I will be judged or socially shunned for saying what I'm feeling or thinking, my silence is protective. If I am somewhere that is emotionally safe, however, I will be more willing to speak my mind. Encourage a policy of ascribing bravery to speaking aloud. Model, after youth share publicly, how it looks and sounds to validate a young person taking the risk of being seen. In the context of mental wellness, the safety to selfexpress will tend to allow your youth to discuss challenges before they become a crisis.
- Self-express readily and sensibly. Many young people have had experiences that cause them not to feel safe expressing themselves. They might have been sensitive to dismissive remarks that tell them they're not enough. This tendency to self-invalidate arises even in high-functioning families, and can be a product of the adolescent's increased focus on social norms with peers, conflicts in the family system, unchallenged habits of thought and/or an anxious disposition. Other youth, conversely, may speak impulsively, which tends to obstruct communication. What makes us effective as communicators? For some, it's stepping up; for others, it's stepping back.
- Embrace the process. Product comes later. Reflect to the youth what is interesting/ good/moving about what they express, rather than suggesting improvements or corrections. Encourage collaboration, and teens pointing out the similarities and differences (respectfully stated) between their various expressions. Suggestions for taking projects public are included in this toolkit, because we stack on the success of empowering individual expression by building group cohesion.

A Note for Teachers

If you are a youth's teacher in addition to the facilitator of these activities, we realize that some of these roles have many commonalities with the role of teacher, while others may not. These activities are not meant to represent standardized, factual knowledge, but rather to practice the relational skills of perspective-taking and communication. If you are in a classroom situation where grades need to be assigned, we suggest basing those evaluations on:

- resorting to sarcasm or dismissiveness from the start?
- challenge and/or add to another's ideas in a respectful way?

"Why are we doing this?"

The question might be stated aloud, or it might be expressed as hesitation to engage on the part of the youth with whom you are working. If you are challenged in this way, here are some responses to address commonly held doubts:

- matter of degree, not a matter of deciding that one person is well and another is not.
- maintain one's best level of functioning.
- better more often, which is a primary goal of being mentally well.

Children's Hospital Colorado

• Engagement in the activity. Relative to the expressive style of the student, are they exhibiting willingness to participate and share? Are they giving the exercises a chance, or are they

• Appropriateness of responses to peers. Are comments supportive of peers? Can they reflect,

• The mental health of children and adolescents is a major public health concern. In any given year, one in five children and youth will experience a mental health problem, and 75% of all mental health problems begin by age 24 (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2013). As a result, most of us encounter it on a regular basis, whether we are aware of it or not. We want to increase compassion for those suffering mental illness, and we're going to get there by recognizing that mental wellness exists on a spectrum. Wellness is a

• A healthy person deals with stress and challenges every day. Wellness is not about achieving constant happiness, nor an absence of pain or problems. It's about effectively coping with everyday stressors. The toolkit is designed with the supposition that mental health is as important as physical health. Like physical health, mental health requires good practices to

 The stigma surrounding mental health interferes with people getting the help they need. If conversation about mental wellness is demeaning or shaming, we miss opportunities to feel

Supports for Adults Implementing this Toolkit

Navigating conversations around emotional wellness can be daunting. However, most youth are already having many of these conversations with others, especially their peers. Adults may want to consider their own supports in delivering these activities:

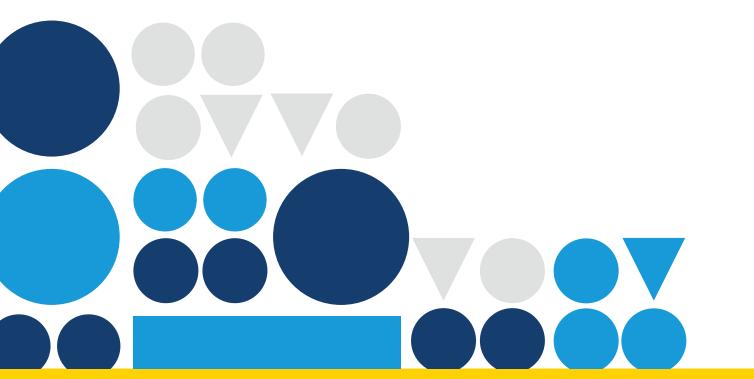
- Understand your own experiences with emotional wellness and practices that support your own resiliency prior to engaging in this conversation with youth. Who are the people who support you personally? With whom might you be able to debrief following a difficult interaction? What is your self-care routine?
- Apprise yourself of the resources available to your youth if any difficult situation arises. You will want to consider if you have access to additional support like guidance counselors, school counselors, mental health counselors on or off site or telephone or web-based mental health support services.
- If a youth discusses concerning thoughts or behaviors (such as thoughts of suicide or selfharm) during any of these activities, you need to take further action. Ally yourself with mental health professionals at your site. Reports of wanting to hurt oneself or others are always to be taken seriously. Be aware of your organization's emergency procedures for responding to youth in crisis.

Using this Toolkit

This toolkit is made up of five primary "actions" that can be facilitated in succession, or could be implemented independently in classroom or community-based settings. We often refer to the activities herein as "actions" to emphasize that we are empowering our youth to learn to advocate and to create change, not only guide them through a classroom-type activity. We recommend that the opening and closing actions (Preparing for Actions and Reflection and Closing) are facilitated as bookends, no matter how many other actions you facilitate between them. Depending on your group's time availability, you may then guide your youth through as many of the middle actions (Actions 1, 2 and 3) as you like. There is an additional "extension activity" (Action 4) that a facilitator or teacher can use with the primary actions to create a broader dialogue around social and emotional health in your school or community. If you choose to implement Extension Action 4, wait until that longer-term project is complete before leading the Reflection and Closing. These activities are intended to be used with youth in grades 8-12.

Each activity includes the following:

- Background: Provides a brief rationale for the approach to the lesson.
- Activity objectives: Specifies target skills and emotional goals for each activity.
- Supplies required: Details the supplies needed to facilitate the activity.
- Procedure: Includes the steps to facilitating the activity; steps are numbered. Any additional details about an activity, or specific points that can be made to facilitate a conversation around the topic are offered as suggestions and indicated by a letter or numeral bullet. Approximate time guidelines are given for sections within each activity, with an estimated 60 minutes allotted for each activity. Words in italics are suggested talking points that a facilitator could say/ask and words in regular font include directions to the facilitator.
- Common challenges: We have found that certain activities tend to bring up specific kinds of challenges. Describes common pitfalls and potential solutions are discussed.
- For more information: Provides websites that contain information that can support the specific activity.



Emotional safety is a primary component of not only open and frank discussions about mental health issues, but also for the activities that follow in this toolkit. Part of creating safety is establishing group norms. The intention of this activity is to create not only safety, but also a context of mutual agreement versus a context of compliance. Keep in mind, in this and all the activities therein, that any one group will represent many cultural and family contexts, and many different personal histories with how mental health issues have been experienced.

Preparing for Actions

A wide variety of valid perspectives will be expressed throughout the execution of this toolkit, and the facilitator's role is to create a sense of shared ground, rather than singular conclusions. Even "positive" qualities may have been experienced by some people in association with punishment or shame, so discuss how ideas offered are relevant to your group working together effectively and successfully.

PROCEDURE

5 MIN

10 MIN

Part 1: Toolkit rationale, group norms and safety

- 1. Explain why you chose to implement this toolkit. Anything you can share about your personal investment in the topic, without disclosing more than is appropriate or that you are comfortable with, will model the kind of discussion intended. Even if you don't feel you have a particularly compelling personal anecdote about the topic, simply expressing the ways that you care is highly relevant to this discussion.
- 2. One in five youth will experience a mental health problem. Offer this statistic, as well as any others you find interesting or relevant, to start a discussion about how mental health is a topic that touches most everyone in some way.
- 3. To create group norms, the following sequence of discussion statements and questions can be used verbatim, or you can restate them in your own way, modifying them to suit a group of youth with whom you are already familiar.

GOALS OF ACTIVITY

- · Create a foundation and safe environment for discussing emotional wellness
- Explore youth's understanding of social and emotional wellness
- Define core concepts used throughout this toolkit
- Discuss parts of this toolkit

- Post-it notes
- Two or four large pieces of butcher paper
- Dry erase or other markers
- Appendix A of definitions

- a. During our time together, we want everyone in our group to feel safe and respected, so we are going to take some time now to create norms and expectations together that will help us reach these goals.
- b. Have you ever been in a group with shared norms/expectations? What did you like about it? What didn't you like about it?
- c. What expectations make you feel safe? What expectations make you feel respected?
- d. Are there any expectations that make you feel unsafe or disrespected?
- 4. Hand out note cards to youth and ask them to write one group norm or expectation that they think is important on the card. Youth need not write their names on the card, since the norms are not meant to be attached to any one individual. Collect the cards.
- 5. Ask for a volunteer to act as scribe during the discussion. Have the scribe write each idea on the board as expressed on the card, as it is discussed, so everyone can see the ideas that are being shared.
- 6. Review the cards with the youth and discuss what they believe the norms should be for this program. If general, abstract concepts are offered as norms (e.g., "respect"), ask the group what that quality would look like in terms of observable behavior(s). Allow for multiple perspectives on the word.
- 7. For every norm suggested, ask all group members to rate how important they feel the norm is, by putting their thumbs up (important), thumbs to the side (acceptable) or thumbs down (not important or not relevant).
- 8. Ask the youth what they would like to call these norms/expectations when they refer to them each week. Creating a shorthand way to refer to these agreements is a quick way to keep the group on track.
- 9. Have the scribe write the name that the group came up with for their "norms" at the top of a new sheet of the butcher paper. Then list the agreements below.
- 10. Ask the youth to commit to the agreements and have each of them sign the poster. You, the group leader, should sign the poster as well.

Part 2—Concept Mapping- Exploring what youth already know

- 1. Write "Mental Health" down on a piece of butcher paper (if you have a large group, you can make two different pieces and break the group into two)
- 2. Hand out three post-it notes to each youth.
- 3. Ask each participant to write down three things they know about mental health, one fact or idea per post-it note.
- 4. Have youth arrange their post-it notes on the butcher paper. Ask them to group similar ideas together and rename the groupings. Draw a "map" of how the ideas relate to one another, and to the topic of mental health. This map can include shapes and lines connecting ideas or showing how they are related.
- 5. Debrief the activity, noticing patterns in what youth already know about mental health.
- 6. Write "Social and Emotional Wellness" down on a new piece of butcher paper (if you have a large group, you can make two different posters and break the group into two).

- 7. Hand out three post it notes to each student.
- or idea per post-it note.
- the overall topic of social and emotional wellness.
- 10. Ask youth how the two groupings are similar, and how they are different.
- emotional wellness.

Part 3: Putting the pieces together-overview of the toolkit

- explore social and emotional wellness.
- and poetry.

COMMON CHALLENGES

Step up, step back.

It is normal within any group for some group members to engage more readily, and some more reluctantly. In creating a culture of safety, we want to allow for a variance of expressive styles. At the same time, those at the far ends of the spectrum -- those who talk at every opportunity, and those who resist participation altogether -- tend to encourage process-blocking behaviors. Those who speak at every turn, or interrupt others, will not allow space for others to show up. Those who don't participate at all tend to be expressing resistance, or a feeling of a lack of safety, which is a strong, nonverbal message. Encourage shy people to choose their moments, even if only briefly, while encouraging those who dominate every conversation to be curious about others' perspectives. Step up, or step back.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Alliance on Mental Illness

https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Learn-More/Mental-Health-by-the-Numbers/ childrenmhfacts.pdf

15 MIN

15 MIN

15 MIN

8. Ask them to write down three things they know about social and emotional wellness, one fact

9. Have youth arrange their post it notes on the board. Ask them to group similar ideas together, and rename the groupings. Again, draw a "map" of how the ideas relate to one another, and to

11. Talk about how, in the next few lessons, the group activities will focus on social and

12. Be sure to keep the concept maps, as they will revisit their ideas during the debrief lesson.

13. Hand out a copy of Appendix A, which is our shorthand set of important definitions for

this toolkit. Have the group compare given definitions with the concept maps just created.

1. Explain that altogether, this toolkit involves using self-expression in a creative context to

2. Youth will explore their emotions, communication and social interactions using photography

3. After the group participates in the lesson, an extra, optional social action is suggested as a way for the group to share their work with the school/community. Youth can choose to share each project/expressive tool with the community, or they can choose just one expressive tool.

The six-word-story project, Mental Health is All Our Stories, came about following a series of discussions regarding common misconceptions of mental health problems. The YAB put our insights into 6-word stories, and we shaped our insights with this directive in order to emphasize the need to do more than talk about this challenging subject. The creative constraint of six words offers youth the opportunity to succeed at a brief directive, while also focusing thoughts and encouraging a quality of depth in the editing process. The simplicity of the directive allows for multiple viewpoints, and collecting the various stories into a single place lends itself to effective public projects.

The creative constraint of "exactly 6 words" allows for sustained focus on a single idea, and forces the writer into taking multiple perspectives on a topic. In mental health terms, the constraint leads the writer to practice executive functioning (decisionmaking), and the many aspects of social and emotional intelligence that go into choosing how we represent ourselves with our words. It also bridges the emotionally charged territory of subjective experience with issues in the external world.

PROCEDURE

20 MIN

- 1. Present the definition of resilience: Resilience is the ability to thrive, adapt and cope in the face of tough, stressful situations. Resilience can counteract stress by reducing the impact of that stress. It is a skill that can be learned, taught and practiced.
- 2. Possible discussion questions (choose at least a few):
 - a. What have you seen friends, family members and caretakers do to deal with really hard times?
 - b. What gives you hope and strength when things get tough?
 - c. Is it normal not to be happy all the time? Where is the line between unhappy and needing help?
 - d. What might you ask of someone else when you're having a hard time?
 - e. Name a time when you dealt with a difficult situation successfully. What did you do? If you can only remember unsuccessful situations, what do you wish you had done?
 - f. What are everyday things you can do, on purpose, to improve how you feel?

ACTION 1 Mental Health is All our Stories

GOALS OF ACTIVITY

(CASEL Competencies)

- Build self-management skills (1d, 2a)
- Build social awareness (2a,b,d)
- Increase responsible decision-making skills (5a,b)

- Pencil/pen
- Blank paper
- Appendix B 6WS examples (can be handout, or a projection/large screen of corresponding website in classroom)

- Ask each youth to free write ideas about resilience generated by discussion. This writing can be exposition, or simply lists of points made.
- 4. Show/share Appendix B: Six Word Stories Examples (do not present before youth have brainstormed their own list of ideas).
- 5. Ask at least a couple youth to reflect on what makes the six words effective, despite being so short.
- 6. Have each youth take a few of their ideas, one at a time, and find a way to say each one in six words. Give working time. Aim for ~3 stories per person. Youth who finish quickly might be encouraged to write more, or to assist others who request help with wording. (Practicing an area of competence, asking for and receiving help, and being of service to others are all examples of resilience practices!)
- 7. Ask each youth to read their stories aloud. As they are short, group members may ask to hear stories a second time.
- 8. Use white board or wall space to hang each story after it is read.
- **9. Optional:** How might you share your stories with your larger organization or school community? (See Action 4: Spreading the message in your school/community/youth with whom you are already familiar.)

COMMON CHALLENGES:

"Does it have to be six words?"

The short answer is "yes." This is not because there's anything special about six words, but because the creative constraint will join their work to an already established body of work. The constraint also forces internal dialogue between social intelligence and decision-making processes. Validate attempts made to that point, and continue to inquire into how words can be added or subtracted, or how the point of view might be tweaked. Go back to existing examples of six-word stories, and assist the youth in crafting, and thus deepening, their creative engagement.

"What did you say?"

Ask readers to read the story again, speaking more slowly on the repetition, since the listeners' audio processing is far slower than the reader's visual processing of the words. Facilitate positive feedback for each student/youth, highlighting new perspectives offered.

"I can't think of anything."

This tends to indicate either a fear of their work being judged, or some underlying intensity to the directive that creates uncomfortable feelings of vulnerability. It is also plausible that writing in this way is new territory for them, and they really don't know what perspective to take. Youth in this situation can be invited into the directive simply in terms of the six-word constraint. Encourage them to write about things they heard their peers say, and don't "cross examine" them about which ideas they choose. Their choice may be personally meaningful, or it may not be; either way, they are expressing a type of boundary with their resistance. Simply naming a perspective is valuable in and of itself. We are not demanding that people be more vulnerable than they feel ready to be.

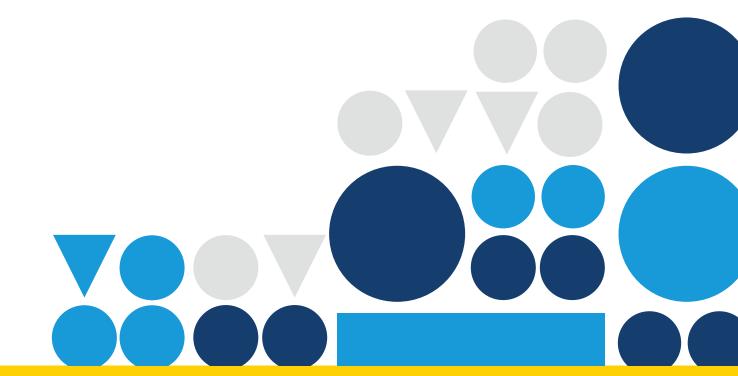
FOR MORE INFORMATION

Six Word Memoirs

Starting in November 2006, nearly 1 million short stories have been shared to date. In classrooms and boardrooms, churches and synagogues, veterans' groups and across the dinner table, Six-Word Memoirs have become a powerful tool to catalyze conversation, spark imagination or break the ice. This website shares 6 word memoirs from across the globe.

sixwordmemoirs.com

sixwordstories.net



10 MIN

15 MIN

15 MIN

The 2014-2015 YAB project involved youth writing, acting and editing a short video called The LISTEN Project. This project premiered at TEDxYouth@Mile High in early April 2015 through an interactive exhibit. It was also shown at two large mental health related community events. The LISTEN Project encourages each of us to be active in feeling and expressing our emotions, while being open to listening to others as they do the same.

This is a unique project in that the entirety of the project was initiated and developed by the YAB members themselves. The project integrated poetry writing, throwing paint and collaborating with a dance/movement therapist to script the movements involved. Because the video represents the integration of so many ideas into a single, short piece, the exercise we share with you is not a re-creation of the project. Rather, we ask that people watch, react to and discuss the video, as it contains many layers of metaphor, expressed simultaneously through verbal, visual and auditory channels.

PROCEDURE

5 MIN

- 1. Distribute "list of qualities" (Appendix C)
- 2. Ask youth to read through the list, with a focus on choosing a word that they would like to work with today. This may be a word that fits well with their recent experiences, a quality that is desired but seems absent, or perhaps simply a feeling of being drawn to a particular word without knowing exactly why. Do not ask youth to justify their choice, simply to choose one. Note that all the words are potentially meaningful, but not concrete things.
- 3. Instruct youth to write their chosen word at the top of a blank page. Inform them that they will be making a list of tangible things or metaphors associated with that word in response to a series of prompts. Ask that they stay with the given prompt until the next prompt is given.

ACTION 2 The LISTEN Project



GOALS OF ACTIVITY (CASEL Competencies)

- Build self-awareness (1a,b,c,d,e)
- Feel & show empathy for others (3a,b,c,d)
- Find & express personal values (4a, 5f)

- Pencil/pen
- Blank paper
- Copies of Qualities List (Appendix C) – enough for each youth to have one
- Projector/large screen/ speakers and computer with internet access for viewing The LISTEN Project (www.youtube.com/ watch?v=7KfUjHsctEA; can also be found by searching "listen project children's hospital" on YouTube)

- 4. Encourage a brainstorming approach, where youth write ideas as they think of them, rather than mulling over what they will write down. You might use reminders like "first thought, best thought," and "try to keep your pen(cil) moving." One-word list items are fine, but also encourage that a whole phrase might be necessary to describe the imagined sensation (e.g., "a sunset over the mountains" may name a desired image more precisely than "the sun.")
- 5. Begin giving prompts for list items. Allow enough time to write at least a few items on their list for each prompt:
 - a. What might you see with your eyes that would remind you of your chosen word?
 - b. What sounds might you hear that remind you of your word?
 - c. Suppose your word had a physical body. Describe how it feels to move.
 - d. Name some things that your word has to look out for.
 - e. What makes your word strong?
- 6. Ask youth to read their lists aloud. If the class is particularly large, or your time is limited, you might break the group into smaller circles so that all youth can read to each other.
- 7. Ask that after each youth reads, peers offer some reflection about images that they liked, or something about their perspective that "stuck."
- 8. Then, in preparation for watching the video, ask youth "How do you respond to stress/ unhappiness in people that you are close to?"
 - a. What helps?

15 MIN

15 MIN

5 MIN

20 MIN

- b. What doesn't help, even when done with good intentions?
- c. At what point in the process of being upset do you seek help?
- 9. Watch the video "The LISTEN Project."
- 10. Discuss the video. Possible discussion questions:
 - a. Do you agree/disagree with the pairing of words for stress & words for support? Why?
 - b. Does the video give you any new ideas about how to approach your friends, family and/or community members?
 - c. Note that in the video, the ordering of the letters spells "silent," though they are arranged to spell "listen" at the end. What gets in the way of seeking and offering support?
 - d. How might the strength-based word you wrote and spoke about today offer comfort or support to yourself or others?

COMMON CHALLENGE

Stage fright

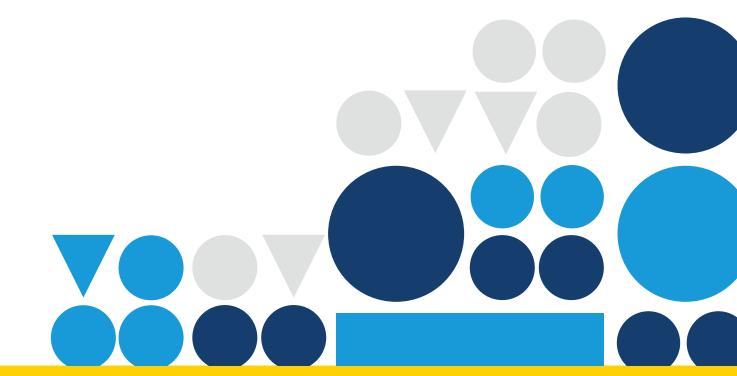
For many people, reading their own lists aloud is very challenging. They might be self-judging of their own writing, or the thought of doing anything that resembles performing in front of others is scary. Start by validating that hesitation, then invite their participation based on your knowledge of the teen. Do they respond well to challenge, or are they so anxious that "making" them read aloud will only distract from the exercise? You might remind the nervous teens that participation is the biggest goal of the exercise. Encourage them to do so in ways that are less exposing, even if they choose not to read. One of the intentions of these exercises is to normalize conversations about one's subjective experience, so resist the urge the force them past their sense of vulnerability. If the teen continues to decline to read, you might ask if it would be okay for someone else to read what they wrote. You might ask peers to encourage them by expressing their curiosity about the teen's writing. Invite their participation, rather than require it.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Story Center

Partners with organizations around the world on projects in StoryWork, digital storytelling and other forms of digital media production. Provides workshops and examples of projects from across the globe.

storycenter.org



The inaugural (2013-2014) YAB project was designed to provide youth's perspective and insights into mental health at the hospital and beyond. In order to achieve this directive, youth took photos of what mental health meant to them, in a process known as PhotoVoice. In addition to the PhotoVoice directive, youth wrote from the perspective of one of the objects within their photo. We offer a version of this directive, which we found deepened youths' understanding of mental health topics, and challenged them to find and create their own metaphors. Thirteen photos along with selections from their writing were made into an exhibit that was featured widely across Colorado.

One quality of a resilient person is the ability to entertain both present-moment emotion, as well as rational and reflective thought, at the same time. During typical teenage development, strong emotional impulses and more logical, practical decision making processes are learning to coexist. For some teens, this translates as a time of heightened emotional expression and socialization. Boundaries are pushed outwardly, for better (extracurricular participation in organizations, achievement and engagement in valued activities) and sometimes for worse (conformist, destructive, provocative or rebellious acts). For other teens, the intensifying complexity of feelings makes them more inward, quiet and unsure of themselves and their growing, changing identities. In finding a balance between felt experience and outward expression, both outward socializers and inward ruminators can find some means for balancing. In this balance is creative expression, where feeling and reflective thought come to some sort of understanding.

PROCEDURE

15 MIN

- 1. Distribute/have available writing supplies.
- 2. Introduce conversation about what "mental wellness" might mean to youth (or review points from earlier discussions, if you have performed previous activities)
 - a. How does one's mental health affect their thoughts, feelings and behaviors?
 - b. As opposed to mental illness, what do we do to create mental wellness on emotional. mental and social levels?

ACTION 3 Illuminate the Darkness

GOALS OF ACTIVITY

- Feel & show empathy for others (3a,b,c,d)
- Begin developing an underlying social awareness (2a,b,d)
- Develop skills for selfregulation (1a, 3a)

- Pencil/pen
- Blank paper
- Projector, with a couple leader-chosen Illuminate the Darkness photos ready to project
- Copies of Illuminate the Darkness photos (picture only) (Appendix D) - enough for each student/youth to have one. OR
- Add 10-20 additional minutes to allow youth to photograph their own image

- 3. Use projected images or handouts of the images, one at a time, to generate group discussion of how each image might be a metaphor for mental illness. Discuss only as many images as you feel you need in order for the group to describe aloud a general understanding of visual metaphor. Usually two or three is sufficient.
- 10-20 MIN

15 MIN

15 MIN

4. OPTIONAL. If you have time (an additional 10-20 minutes), you might encourage youth at this point, if they are allowed their phones, to create/photograph their own images that could be a metaphor for mental illness.

- One useful constraint is not to allow youth to use people in the photo it can be only photographed objects. Encourage individual, reflective work and discourage distracting socialization during this photo-gathering time.
- Encourage the youth to photograph the same object several different ways. This approach brings attention to the role of perspective-taking, having teens demonstrate to themselves that their point of view (how they frame a photograph) changes the feel of a single thing.
- 5. Following either the photo-gathering time, or laying out of Illuminate the Darkness (ItD) images, have each student choose any one of their own, or any of the ItD, photos.
- 6. Give writing directions:
 - a. You will write from the point of view of any object within your photo
 - b. Hence, you will write in the 1st-person ("I" statements), about what you are experiencing as that object. You are encouraged to take cues from the photograph to answer the following questions, though some questions might require simply using your imagination.
 - What are you looking at?
 - What are you listening to?
 - What are you feeling?
 - What are you thinking?
 - Is this a moment within a longer story? If so, talk about what you are remembering or looking forward to.
- 7. Allow for several minutes of free-write time.
- 8. Have class/group break into pairs, allowing any necessary groups of three. Within the small groups, ask the youth to read their free-writes aloud to each other as their partner looks at the source photograph. Some guidelines:
 - a. The listener is listening specifically for words/phrases/passages that they find particularly interesting, powerful or memorable. Take time after each reader to allow the listener to ask for something to be repeated, to reflect back on their favorite images or to offer back one or two images that stuck in their mind. The reader might want to underline passages, or take notes about the feedback they receive. The reader might also reflect on passages where they felt the most emotion or power, which they may or may not have felt during the writing process. Often the reader and listener will notice the same passages.
 - b. This is not about agreement or disagreement about how the photograph is interpreted. Don't tell the reader they were wrong, or start suggesting the contrast in how YOU saw the picture. The exercise is about validating the content of what was shared by the writer. Validating might look like expressing interest, understanding, curiosity or enthusiasm about anything in the writer's perspective.

15 MIN

- interesting or powerful about the perspective of the photo.
- viewing time.
- next section (Action 4) on sharing the group's work publicly.

COMMON CHALLENGES

Avoiding the metaphor

You are likely to notice some teens avoid making meaning out of any of their images. They might make a joke of their picture, or use a purposefully blunt cliché. They might claim not to see any "deeper" meaning. This may indicate that the youth feels vulnerable in sharing "sensitive" perspectives, or simply that they are unpracticed at using metaphor. Encourage use of the picture to inform perspective, validating that one is indeed "making it up," and that this process of creating meaning is one that we all do. Part of using the image for creating the metaphor is that the art process de-personalizes the artist's perspective to some extent, and gives a focus for considering the larger issue.

Perfectionism

Some youth may fret over getting a "correct" meaning, and not allow themselves to enjoy their own preferences. The goal in choosing an image is a balance of self-reflection with following one's own emotional impulses. In the case of choosing which photo to work with, for example (whether one's own or one of the given images), tell them (honestly) that there is no correct answer, and that every image has some potential.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This intervention was a combination of two existing directives: Photovoice and a writing directive from the book Brave New Voices: The YOUTH SPEAKS Guide to Teaching Spoken Word Poetry.

Background on Photovoice: photovoice.org

Background for Youth Speak's Brave New Voices: youthspeaks.org

Children's Hospital Colorado

9. Break again into individual work. Direct writers to use the reading and feedback time to create a single caption for their chosen photo, one that articulates what they find

10. Create a "gallery" of completed images with their captions, and allow for group

11. If the class has interest in curating their collection to share with other communities, see

Project-based learning can provide an outlet for youth to apply their newly formed skills. The social and emotional process involved in sharing personal work with a school or community can provide new avenues for building self-efficacy, collective efficacy and self-esteem. Furthermore, the process of planning and implementing a project within any setting provides youth with real-world skills. In interviews after participating in the YAB, leaders commented on how important sharing their work with the community was.

This extension activity allows youth to further reduce mental health stigma among their peers, teachers, program staff and/ or community members. Stigma is perpetuated by negative stereotypes about mental health and illness. This activity allows youth to tackle these stereotypes by demonstrating that it is okay to talk about mental health and wellness.

Note that this activity, like the ones that precede it, has been structured as a sixty-minute activity. However, implementation of the longer-term goals that the group creates will require time and task management beyond this single session.

PROCEDURE

5 MIN

15 MIN

- Decide the intention of sharing your mental health-related activity with a larger audience. Which of the projects do you want to share? What is the scope of your group's sharing (e.g., how wide an audience do you want to reach?) What are you hoping to accomplish by sharing your project(s)?
- 2. In order to fulfill your group's intentions, you will need to create and accomplish any number of goals. A good goal must be SMART:
 - a. Specific- a goal should specify how something is to be done, by whom and how you will know that you will have achieved your goal.
 - b. Measurable- includes some of the following: quantity, quality, frequency, costs, etc. This aspect answers the "how much/many" questions.
 - c. Achievable- the goal should be something that the group, with their current knowledge and skills, can do.

ACTION 4 Sharing Your Work with Your School/ Community

GOALS OF ACTIVITY (CASEL Competencies)

- Increase sense of individual and collective efficacy – the belief that a group of youth can create change together (1d, 1e, 2f)
- Enhance and practice decision-making skills for implementing an event at your school/community (4a, 4d, 5c, 5d, 5e)

- Copies of Possible Actions (Appendix E) for each youth
- Planning form (Appendix F)

- d. Relevant- describes why the particular goal is necessary.
- e. Time-bound- describes when the task should be completed.
- f. Have youth assess the following goal and rewrite it using the SMART criteria: A SMART goal might look like: By October 31, we want to educate at least 100 people about our mental health project and have at least 25 people participate in it.
- Discuss possible ways to take action (hand out Possible Actions in Appendix E). Ask youth to rate/rank (1 is the best, 4 is the worst) for each of the potential actions. Note the top three, then vote for the best.
- 4. As a class or in small groups, complete the Planning Form (Appendix F) based off of your selected action.
- 5. Support youth in completing their plan.
- 6. Once youth have completed their community project (sharing their work with their school/community), debrief, using the following questions to support reflection, either individually, in groups or as a whole class:
 - a. What went well?

10 MIN

15 MIN

15 MIN

- b. What would you change if you had to do it over again?
- c. Did we reach our stated goal?
- d. What did you learn from doing this? About our class? About yourself? About our school?

COMMON CHALLENGES

Time. Planning school or community events often takes considerable time.

Ask students to be honest about the time they can contribute to creating the project. It is acceptable and natural for certain students to take the lead and others to play more supportive roles.

Navigating systems.

In our work with the YAB, not every institution feels the same degree of comfort supporting mental health work. Getting approval for the action from various organizations may require further discussion with representatives from those organizations to address their concerns and logistical needs. Each school, organization and community has a protocol for hosting events or sharing information. Be sure to contact the decision-maker(s) within your setting to understand which procedures needs to be addressed/planned for.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Supports schools to integrate youth voice and involvement.

Soundout.org

Reflection and Closing

Finding and creating closure around experiences is a valuable part of emotional wellness. Taking the time to create meaning out of situations allows for further levels of understanding and integration. This is not to say that every process needs to be further reflected on, nor that this process was necessarily poignant for every person involved. If you have gotten this far in the toolkit, however, the youth you work with have likely experienced a mixture of pride and avoidance, curiosity and ambiguity, realization and confusion.

> As we are trying to model maximally healthy social and emotional functioning, we want to take the time to allow the natural mix of thoughts and feelings to percolate, for youth to practice extracting their own meanings and messages, and for youth to share openly their appreciation for each other.

PROCEDURE

Part 1—Revisit concept map and reflect on learning

- 1. Hang the concept maps that you created in the first session
- 2. Ask youth to revise or create new connections with the information they knew at the start of the session.
- 3. Debrief by asking youth to write responses to the following questions::
 - a. What is something new you have learned about yourself?
 - b. What new information or understandings have you gained?
 - c. Was there ever a time when you did not want to participate? If so, what can you learn from your decision to either participate or not?

Part 2—Warm fuzzies

- Ask each group member to create a memento from this collection of activities. This memento might be a collage of phrases or images from activities that each student participated in, or might be the youth's own representation of any take-away messages they have heard or come to understand. Ask group members to create, using art supplies on hand, a small visual representation that sums up their experience.
- Ask youth to pass around their collage/memento and have others in the group write one thing they appreciated about the person, or what they shared during the time they were working on this toolkit. Make sure you, as the facilitator, write on each student's memento.

GOALS OF ACTIVITY

- · Reflection on learning
- Practicing endings/closure

SUPPLIES REQUIRED

 Construction paper or other supplies to create the memento

COMMON CHALLENGES

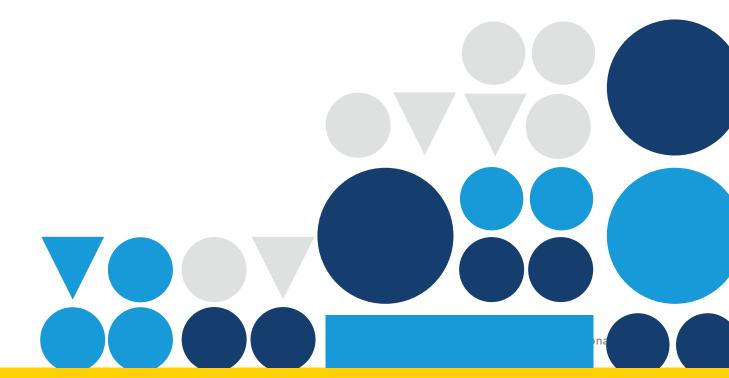
Endings.

Asking members of a group to create an ending is not necessarily a small thing to ask. It requires reflection on experiences that, while intended to be "good" or "positive," might have brought up less desirable feelings as well. Dismissal, avoidance, ambiguity and/or uncomfortable social dynamics might disincline a person to want to reflect on experiences, and instead simply move forward. In creating endings, we hope to use our hindsight to make meaning and begin to resolve our misunderstandings. For some, the messages that come out of the process will be what they remember. For others, simply practicing the motions of reflection will begin to introduce closure as a possibility in future situations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Advocates for youth rights and voice in mental health and the other systems that serve them, for the purpose of empowering youth to be equal partners in the process of change.

youthmovenational.org



10 MIN

10 MIN

40 MIN

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Key Definitions

Mental health

This phrase has more than one meaning. Generally mental health refers to one's degree of emotional and cognitive well-being and ability to cope with everyday demands. "Mental health" also refers to the therapeutic professions that address the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders. Because of this broad range of meanings, we minimize its use in this toolkit.

Mental illness

This refers to various disorders where an individual's thoughts, emotions or social functioning are impaired. Mental illnesses are treated by professionals within the mental health field, and education about mental illness is not the goal of this toolkit. We encourage adults who work with youth to enroll in a Youth Mental Health First Aid course, which introduces the most common mental illnesses, how to recognize warning signs and how to support youth with mental health challenges.

Mental wellness

Like the more general definition of "mental health," mental wellness refers to the practices that support, encourage and reinforce emotional, social and cognitive well-being. We use this phrase more often in this toolkit, as it reflects that psychological, social and cognitive well-being are processes that we are all engaged in.

Resilience

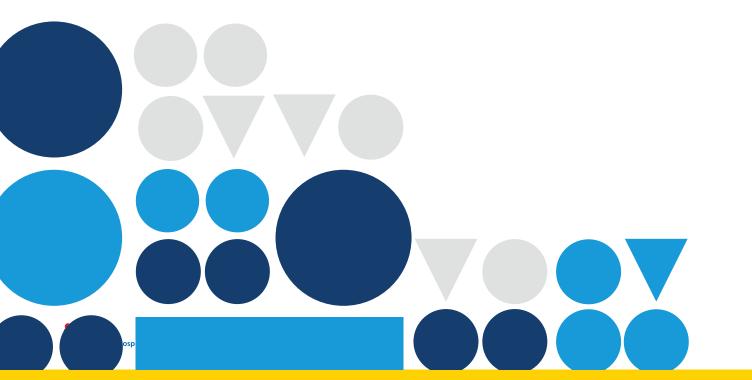
Resilience is the ability to thrive, adapt and cope in the face of tough, stressful situations. Resilience can counteract stress by reducing the impact of that stress. It is a skill that can be learned, taught and practiced. The exercises in this toolkit are intended to engage youth in practicing resilience skills.

Appendix B

Appendix C

6-word story examples (from sixwordmemoirs.com)

Lots to say, too little room.	Those unspoken words are unheard tears.
Please don't ever let me go.	Don't love where there's not affection
Internet fails to be comforting shoulder.	Smiling, laughing, crying, I'm living life.
Found someone to make me smile.	Strength: made by flaws, love, emotion.
Playing music with people who care.	Can't hear you over being fabulous.



List of Qualities

Acceptance	Discipline
Affection	Discretion
Ambition	Elegance
Appreciation	Empathy
Authenticity	Enlightenment
Awareness	Enthusiasm
Balance	Excellence
Beauty	Faith
Bliss	Focus
Boldness	Forgiveness
Calm	Freedom
Capability	Generosity
Caring	Grace
Caution	Grief
Clarity	Happiness
Compassion	Harmony
Confidence	Норе
Consistency	Humor
Contentment	Honesty
Co-operation	Humility
Courage	Imagination
Courtesy	Integrity
Creativity	Independence
Curiosity	Innovation
Delight	Insight
Determination	Inspiration
Devotion	Interest
Dignity	Intelligence

Intensity Intuition Joy Kindness Leadership Love Loyalty Magnificence Maturity Modesty Motivation Need Openness Optimism Originality Passion Patience Peace Perseverance Play Poise Power Precision Pride Purity Reliability Resilience Respect

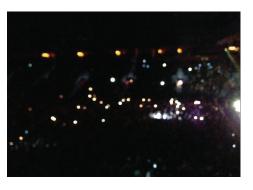
Responsibility Selflessness Sensitivity Serenity Simplicity Sincerity Skill Spontaneity Stability Strength Success Support Sympathy Tact Talent Taste Tenacity Tenderness Tolerance Toughness Trust Understanding Versatility Vitality Warmth Willingness Wisdom Worthiness

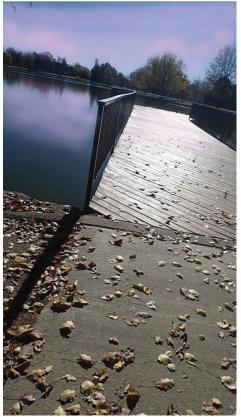
Appendix D

Illuminate the Darkness Images

















-Abi

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Appendix E

Possible Actions

Read each option, then rank them from 1 (preferred) to 4 (your least favorite)

Writing a news article/zine/blog post - news articles/blog posts are al ways to reach a potentially large specific audience (it depends on who reads the paper/zine/blog). You can provide facts about a topic, and you can generally share photos or quotes of participants in the project. This type of action doesn't require a lot of planning, but it does require that you have connections to the editor or owner of the blog. YourHub is a public blog hosted by the Denver Post that is relatively easy to publish on.

Create a social media campaign - sharing your project on social media can generate interest, but it takes a diligent and create approach. The best way to get a lot of coverage from your project is to tie into an existing event or celebration (Day of Silence, Children's Mental Health Day, Red Ribbon Week, etc). You may want to look into the best times of day/week to post information. Having a #hashtag is also a good way to track people's participation. Often incentivizing people's participation can encourage youth within a particular setting (a school) to repost or tag themselves.

Host a table/exhibit - you can host a table during the lunch hour, during back to school night or other popular days/nights at your school/community setting. At the table/exhibit, you can hand out a flyer about your project, which can give people more information about mental health and the work you did as a group. You typically need to get permission from the principal or director and get on the calendar sometimes weeks in advance, so hosting a table can require some planning. Also, you want to make sure your table/exhibit is engaging. Can you dream up a game that relates to the project you did that you can have people play? Can they comment on your photos or create their own 6-word story? Make sure you create an announcement to accompany the day/week you are going to be sharing your work.

Create posters/flyers/factsheet - by creating a mini newsletter/flyer/factsheet about your project and distributing to a specific audience, you can help others learn about your work and a few facts. The key to creating a good flyer/poster/factsheet is to think about the "what", "so what" and "now what." Or, in other words, be very clear about what your message is, why people should care and what they should do about it. Do you want people to stop using the word "crazy" or post a selfie with your flyer? If you create posters, where will they hang? How long? Who is likely to see them? You can also have an event where you hold signs along a roadway (with permission of course).

Appendix F

Planning form

- 1. What is your SMART goal?
- 2. What is the action you wish to take to accomplish the goal?
- 3. How will you know if you've achieved your goal? What evidence will you collect?
- 4. Does this action require approval from anyone outside of your group/class?
 - a. YES or NO
 - b. If YES, Who? Name: Phone Number: Email address:
 - c. Who is going to be in charge of contacting this person to get approval?
- 5. When will this event/action take place? Is there any special day/celebration that will increase the number of people interested in your event?
- 6. How will you advertise about your class taking action?
 - a. Announcements? Write script here:
 - b. Flyers?
 - c. Other?
- - a. If YES, Who?
 - Name:
 - Phone Number:
 - Email address:
 - b. Who is going to be in charge of contacting this person?
- 8. What other resources do you need in order to make this event a success? Make sure you say WHO will follow up on each of the items you list.

7. Will you contact the media/newspaper/a reporter about your project/action? YES or NO

Appendix G

Educational Goals Incorporated in this Toolkit

Toolkit Goals & Context:

Working goals of this toolkit (per authors):

- 1. Find and express personal values
- 2. Have experiences with peers that value authenticity and appropriateness over succeeding at school/tests/third-person facts
- 3. Support direct, meaningful interactions with peers outside of self-selected cliques
- 4. Prioritize resilience over emotional activation and "seeding" mental health diagnoses

These goals were selected because they align with existing Social and Emotional Learning goals as outlined below. These goals also align with some of the Common Core Standards.

Goals of Social Emotional Learning (SEL):

- Manage emotions
- · Set and achieve positive goals
- · Feel and show empathy for others
- Establish and maintain positive relationships
- Make responsible decisions

Goals of Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) competencies:

- 1. Self-awareness
 - a. Identifying emotions
 - b. Accurate self-perception
 - c. Recognizing strengths
 - d. Self-confidence
 - e. Self-efficacy
- 2. Self-management
- a. Impulse control
- b. Self-discipline
- c. Self-motivation
- d. Goal setting

- 3. Social awareness a. Perspective -taking
- b. Empathy
- c. Appreciating diversity
- d. Respect for others
- 4. Relationship skills
- a. Communication
- b. Social engagement
- c. Relationship Building
- d. Teamwork

Colorado State Educational Standards (alignment with 9th grade)

Reading, Writing Communicating (from 9th grade standards)

- 1.1 Deliver organized and effective oral presentations for diverse audiences and varied purposes
- indicated or appropriate.
- 1.2 Listening critically to comprehend a speaker's message requires mental and physical strategies to direct and maintain attention.
 - Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one on one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
 - Give verbal and nonverbal feedback to the speaker
- 2.2 Increasingly complex informational texts require mature interpretation and study
 - Critique author's choice of expository, narrative, persuasive or descriptive modes to convey a message

Visual Art (from High School Standards)

Standard 1. Observe and Learn to Comprehend

- 1.1 Visual art has inherent characteristics and expressive features
 - Demonstrate skills that utilize the characteristics and expressive features of art and design to communicate meaning (DOK 1-3)
 - Standard 3. Invent and Discover to Create
- 3.1 Demonstrate competency in traditional and new art media, and apply appropriate and available technology to express ideas
 - Create works of art representing personal narratives that use new media (DOK 1-4)
- 3.2 Assess and produce art with various materials and methods
 - Skillfully use a variety of techniques and media to create works of art (DOK 1-4)
 - Discern and articulate the quality of personal works of art using a variety of reflective processes (DOK 1-4)

Comprehensive Health and Physical Education (High School)

Standard: 3. Emotional and Social Wellness in Health

- 3.1 Analyze the interrelationship of physical, mental, emotional, and social health
 - Evaluate effective strategies for dealing with stress (DOK 1-3)



- 5. Responsible decision-making

 - b. Analyzing situations
 - c. Solving problems
 - d. Evaluating

 - f. Ethical responsibility
 - a. Identifying problems

 - e. Reflecting

Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when

21st Century Skills

- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking
- Collaborating
- Communicating

Reading, Writing, Communicating

Inquiry Questions

- How non -verbal cues change intent of presentation
- How does a speaker's personal history affect his point of view?
- What is appropriate feedback?
- What is inappropriate feedback?
- What visual imagery does the author create to activate one or more of the readers' emotions?

Flexibility

Social Skills

Leadership

Relevance and Application

- Electronic presentation tools can be used to enhance oral presentation
- Providing feedback is an important skill that is used in many professional settings.
- Reading multiple genres exposes people's thinking beyond their community.
- As people prepare to become members of society, they will encounter multiple perspectives that will require judgment and scrutiny.

Nature of Reading, Writing and Communicating:

- Skilled listeners understand the context of a presenter's point of view.
- Skilled listeners use their own experiences to relate to a speaker's topic.

Visual Art

Inquiry

How can information be shared artistically?

Relevance and Application

• The identification of personal narratives in art and the translation of their meaning using new media allows for the development of the personal, self-direction skills necessary to be an artist.

Appendix H

Articles that informed this toolkit

Bulanda, J. J., Bruhn, C., Byro-Johnson, T., & Zentmyer, M. (2014). Addressing mental health stigma among young adolescents: evaluation of a youth-led approach. Health & Social Work, 39(2), 73-80. https://doi.org/10.1093/hsw/hlu008

Chandra, A., & Minkovitz, C. S. (2007). Factors that influence mental health stigma among 8th grade adolescents. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 36(6), 763-774. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-006-9091-0

Ke, S., Lai, J., Sun, T., Yang, M. M., H, Wang, J. C. Austin. (2015). Healthy young minds: the effects of a 1-hour classroom workshop on mental illness stigma in high school youth. Community Mental Health Journal, 51(3), 329–337.

https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10597-014-9763-2

Taggart, D. (2008). "We are the ones asking the questions": the experiences of young mental health service users conducting research into stigma: a grounded theory account. University of East Anglia. Retrieved from http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.501108

Wahl, O. F., Susin, J., Kaplan, L., Lax, A., & Zatina, D. (2011). Changing knowledge and attitudes with a middle school mental health education curriculum. Stigma Research and Action, 1(1), 53. https://doi. org/10.5463/sra.v1i1.17

Walker, J. S., Thorne, E. K., Powers, L. E., & Gaonkar, R. (2010). Development of a scale to measure the empowerment of youth consumers of mental health services. Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 18(1), 51-59. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1063426609337388" https://doi. org/10.1177/1063426609337388

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