

Mental Illness and Suicidal Behavior



Alberta Education Health & Life Skills Programs of Studies Outcomes

The student will...

- R – 8.1 Describe the characteristic of persistent negative feeling states, e.g., depression, mood disorders.
- R – 8.2 Describe signs associated with suicidal behavior, and identify intervention strategies.

Teacher Background

Having access to reliable information on mental health and mental illness is crucial for adolescents for a number of reasons. Mental and emotional problems need to be addressed, just like student’s physical health problems.

Even if students have not experienced mental illness, it is very likely that they will know someone who has. Consider the following statistics:

- Mental health problems affect one in five young people at any given time.
- Mental illness is second only to heart disease as the leading cause of disability in Canada and worldwide.
- The first symptoms of mental illness generally appear between the ages of 15-24.
- An estimated 50% of young people with mental illness are not getting help.
- Fear of stigma and the resulting discrimination discourages individuals and families from getting the help they need.

An interesting fact is that 30% of people diagnosed with mental illness will also have a substance use disorder. When people have both we call it a concurrent disorder. It is often difficult to predict why or if someone with a mental illness will use drugs. Sometimes a person who has a mental illness will try a substance as a way to relieve symptoms of their mental illness; other times the use of a substance for whatever reason might cause the mental illness. It is important to be aware of this because regardless of how either disorder started, a person will need treatment for both disorders.

How does a mental illness develop?

Researchers are still working to understand the cause of different mental illnesses. While each mental illness is different, in general, they are believed to have a number of contributing factors including:

- Biological factors: this is the effect of genetics on brain development and brain function.
- Current social and environmental circumstances: for example, relationships, school, family stress, or stressful life events.
- Individual factors: for example self-esteem or way of thinking about self and others.
- Negative early life experiences: for example a traumatic experience, abuse, neglect, death of a family member or close friend.

Teachers Must be Aware of the Limits of Confidentiality

- Any disclosure, incident or thoughts of self-harm require serious attention and should be passed on to appropriate referral.
- Confidentiality must be broken when a student reports neglect or physical, sexual, or psychological abuse. All teachers are mandated to report suspected child abuse.
- Privacy should be respected, even though confidentiality cannot be promised. When information is passed on, tell the student, and inform and involve them in passing on the information to the appropriate people.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Recognize signs of the most common types of mental illness
- Know where to go for help
- Recognize signs of suicidal behavior and identify intervention strategies

Materials

- Activity Sheets:
 - *Understanding Anxiety Disorders*
 - *Understanding Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder*
 - *Understanding Bipolar Mood Disorder*
 - *Understanding Depression*
 - *Understanding Eating Disorders*
 - *Understanding Schizophrenia*
- Handout: *Signs of Trouble - Depression*



- Handout: *Support Strategies/Community Mental Health Resources*
- Handout: *Support Websites*

Get Ready

- Mental illness is a disease that is characterized by a chemical imbalance in the brain. When mental illness strikes it can make it difficult for the sufferer to cope with everyday life. The good news is that there are treatments available to help you feel better.
- The most common mental illness is anxiety disorder, but others are depression, (bipolar mood disorder), schizophrenia, and eating disorders.
- Having a mental illness doesn't mean that you are “crazy” or “nuts”, nor does it mean that you cannot work or have friends. Some of the other myths associated with mental illness are:
 - They are responsible for their own condition, and it is their fault
 - They are violent and uncontrollable
 - They have nothing positive to contribute, and what they say and do is not worthy
- The first symptoms of mental illness often appear in adolescence, so it's important for you to be aware of the symptoms.

Activity 1: Jigsaw Puzzle Activity

- Have the class play the Trivia Mind Match Game at <http://www.tigweb.org/games/mentalhealth>
- Give individual students the opportunity to click on two different cards. If these cards match, have the class answer the multiple choice question that appears.
- This process is repeated until all 16 cards have been turned over.
- Now, explain to students that they are going to do a jigsaw puzzle activity. This means that students will work in small groups and will become “experts” about one mental illness (one piece of the jigsaw puzzle).
- Assign a mental illness to each of 6 small groups (Depression, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Anxiety Disorders, Bipolar Mood Disorder, Schizophrenia, and Eating Disorder). Allow students class time to go on-line and look up information to answer the information on their activity sheet, then come back to their group and summarize their findings.
- Use Handout: Websites for sources of reliable website information
<http://www.cmha.ca>
<http://www.camimh.ca>

<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets>

<http://www.nedic.ca> (eating disorder)

<http://www.caddra.ca> (ADHD)

- Remind them that they will each need to complete their own activity sheet, as they will be switching groups later for discussion.

Reference: CMHA High School Curriculum Guide (Module 3, Activity 2)

<http://www.tigweb.org/tiged/activity/view.html?ActivityID=435>

Activity 2: Suicide Prevention

- Suicide is a leading cause of death among young people ages 15-24. At least 90% of those who die by suicide have a mental illness. If a friend mentions thoughts of suicide or self-harm, you NEED to tell an adult. This may be a parent, teacher or a guidance counselor. It's better to have a friend who is angry with you than to keep their secret and live with knowing you could have helped, but remained silent when your friend was in trouble.
- Write the following scenario on the board:

“Your friend isn’t acting like his old self. He seems really down, and has been doing strange things like giving his favorite things away. He recently told you that he thought the people he knew would be better off without him around and that he’s thought of killing himself. After he tells you, he asks you not to tell anyone else about what he has said.”

- As a class, brainstorm answers to the following questions (review the handout “*Signs of Trouble - Depression*”):
 - Do you think he has a mental health problem?
 - Is he in trouble?
 - What should you do?
- Review the handout with the students “Support Strategies/Community Mental Health Resources”.
- Also review the “Support Websites” handout with students. You may choose to go onto some of the websites during class time to show students what they look like.

Conclusion

You have a feeling that something is “not quite right” about the way someone close to you is behaving. The chances are that there is not a serious problem, and that time, reassurance and support are all that are needed. However, if a mental illness is developing, then getting help early is important. So, it’s important to know the signs and speak up and encourage someone to go for help.

Take Home Activity & Follow-up Classroom Discussion

Have students show their parents the Blue Wave website on their home computer.
www.ok2bblue.com

Sharing the Pieces: As a follow-up to Activity #1, have students form new mixed groups which include at least one member from each of the illness-specific groups. Give each student 2 minutes to report to others in their new group about their specific area of mental illness, highlighting important points about how common the illness is, symptoms, and effective supportive treatments.

Assessment Strategy

- Students will be able to report signs of the five common mental illnesses discussed.
- Students will know what to do to help someone they are concerned about.

References:

Canadian Mental Health Association. (2012). *Teen Mental Health* (CMHA High School Curriculum Guide). Retrieved from:
<http://teenmentalhealth.org/index.php/educators/virtual-classroom/>

Health Canada. (2002). *A Report on Mental Illness in Canada*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.healthcanada>

Institute of Health Economics. (2007). *Mental health statistics in your pocket*. Retrieved from
<http://www.ihe.ca/publications/library/2007/mental-health-economic-statistics>

Activity Sheet:

Understanding Anxiety Disorders

What are anxiety disorders?

Who gets anxiety disorders and how common are they?

Describe some of the symptoms of anxiety disorders:

List and briefly explain some of the main types of anxiety disorders:

What type of treatment is available for people experiencing anxiety disorders?

What other kinds of support can help a person with anxiety disorders recover?

From CMHA Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide <http://www.tigurl.org/images/tiged/docs/activities/301.pdf>

Activity Sheet:

Understanding Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

What is ADHD?

Who gets ADHD and how common is it?

Describe some of the symptoms of ADHD:

What type of treatment is available for people experiencing ADHD?

What other kinds of support can help a person with ADHD recover?

From CMHA Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide <http://www.tigurl.org/images/tiged/docs/activities/301.pdf>

Activity Sheet:

Understanding Bipolar Mood Disorder

What is bipolar mood disorder?

Who gets bipolar mood disorder and how common is it?

Describe some of the symptoms of bipolar mood disorder:

What combination of factors is believed to cause bipolar mood disorder?

What type of treatment is available for people experiencing bipolar mood disorder?

What other kinds of support can help a person with bipolar mood disorder recover?

From CMHA Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide <http://www.tigurl.org/images/tiged/docs/activities/301.pdf>

Activity Sheet:

Understanding Depression

What is depression?

Who gets depression and how common is it?

Describe some of the symptoms of depression:

List and briefly describe some of the main types of depression:

What type of treatment is available for people experiencing depression?

What other kinds of support can help a person with depression recover?

From CMHA Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide <http://www.tigurl.org/images/tiged/docs/activities/301.pdf>

Activity Sheet:

Understanding Eating Disorders

What are eating disorders?

Who gets an eating disorder and how common are they?

Describe some of the symptoms of eating disorders:

What are some of the physical, emotional and psychological effects of eating disorders?

What type of treatment is available for people experiencing an eating disorder?

What other kinds of support can help a person with an eating disorder recover?

From CMHA Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide <http://www.tigurl.org/images/tiged/docs/activities/301.pdf>

Activity Sheet:

Understanding Schizophrenia

What is schizophrenia?

Who gets schizophrenia and how common is it?

Describe some of the symptoms of schizophrenia:

List and briefly explain some of the factors that contribute to the onset of schizophrenia:

What type of treatment is available for people experiencing schizophrenia?

What other kinds of support can help a person with schizophrenia recover?

From CMHA Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide <http://www.tigurl.org/images/tiged/docs/activities/301.pdf>

Signs of Trouble – Depression

What's the difference between just having a bad day and something potentially more serious?

Test your mood	Yes	No
Do you feel sad, depressed or down most of the time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you unable to enjoy the things that once gave you pleasure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you feel tired and/or lack energy most of the time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have trouble sleeping or do you sleep too much?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you find it difficult to concentrate or make decisions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you had an increase or decrease in appetite or weight?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you had feelings of worthlessness or guilt?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you felt frightened or panicky for no apparent reason at all?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you felt restless and found it difficult to sit still?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you been feeling anxious or worried?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you felt like you just cannot go on, or had thoughts of death or dying?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you checked off five (5) of these things, you may be depressed. You should see a health professional as soon as possible, especially if these signs have been present for several weeks. Remember that you don't have to be alone with these feelings, and that depression is treatable.

From Facing the Facts www.virtualwellness.ualberta.ca/index.aspx?Pg=2040

Support Strategies/Community Mental Health Resources

Here are some strategies for supporting someone with mental illness:

- Encourage the person to seek help and support from an adult.
- Spend time with the person, listen to his/her concerns.
- Be hopeful; help them feel like their life will get better.
- Stand by them. Invite your friend to things that you are doing; keeping busy and staying in touch with friends will help your friend feel better, when they are ready.
- Learn as much as you can about mental illness so that you understand what is going on for them.
- If you are a close friend or family member of someone with a mental health problem, make sure that you get help as well. Talk to someone about what is happening. This will help you be a better support person.
- Put the person's life before your friendship. If the person mentions thoughts of suicide, don't keep it secret, even if the person has asked you to.

The following mental health resources are available in Edmonton.
For communities surrounding Edmonton, see your telephone directory.

Local Community Mental Health Resources

Kids HELP Phone: 1-888-668-6868

Kids HELP Phone is Canada's only 24-hour national bilingual counseling service for children and youth. It provides counseling directly to children and youth between the ages of 4-19 and help to adults age 20 and over find services for youth they are concerned about.

Local Distress Line: 211

Health LINK Alberta: 811 or 780-408-LINK (5465)

Edmonton Alberta Health Services Child/Adolescent Mental Health Clinic:
780-427-4491

Canadian Mental Health Association (Edmonton):
780-414-6300 www.cmha-edmonton.ab.ca

Schizophrenia Society (Edmonton): 780-451-4661 www.schizophrenia.ca

Local Doctor's Office: _____

Local Hospital: _____

Websites

Mental Illness, Mental Health and Drug Use Prevention

Blue Wave	www.ok2bbblue.com (mental health) An excellent source of information for youth and their parents on a variety of mental health topics, including stories and video clips of youth who have struggled with mental health concerns.
Canadian Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Resource Alliance	http://www.caddra.ca (ADHD) Lots of information about attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; also tips for help.
Canada Food Guide	www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide Interactive website allows you to design your own food guide recommendations.
Canadian Alliance of Mental Health and Mental Illness	http://www.camimh.ca (mental health) Lots of good general information about mental illness.
Canadian Mental Health	www.cmha.ca/highschool (mental health) This website helps adolescents understand mental health and mental illness, as well as providing lots of Canadian information about where to go for help, and a great list of useful web links.
Deal.org	www.deal.org (drug awareness) Lots of information for youth on substance use.
Mind Your Mind	www.mindyourmind.ca (mental health) An interactive Canadian website for youth and young adults; has interactive educational games and tools, also interviews with individuals about mental health/illness and gambling/substance use; also information about getting help.
Here To Help	http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/factsheets Lots of information on a variety of topics.
National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)	www.nationaleatingdisorders.org (eating disorder) Provides great educational materials.
National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC)	www.nedic.ca (eating disorder) NEDIC is the primary Canadian source of eating disorder (ED) information. NEDIC facilitates Eating Disorder Awareness Week activities across Canada and maintains a directory of Canadian ED services; free information to download; also lots of web links.
Something Fishy	www.something-fishy.org (eating disorder support) Includes a chat room and listing of online support groups; also features a monthly schedule of chat events, interactive bulletin board.
We R Kids	www.werkidsmentalhealth.ca (mental health) Services and supports for mental health concerns; also information for parents and professionals.
Xperiment	www.xperiment.ca (drug awareness) A fun website that describes the effects of drugs on the human body.
Schizophrenia Society of Canada	www.schizophrenia.ca Lots of information about schizophrenia and psychosis; also supports and where to go for help.