

Have students research a celebrity of their choice who has struggled with mental health.

- What are their stories? How did they overcome their challenges?
- Have students develop a public awareness campaign, creating public service announcements (PSAs; – e.g., video, websites, or posters to put up around the school) that address some sort of stigma or negative stereotype related to mental health.
- Have students discuss examples of health-related stigmas from the past that have changed, such as stigmas around HIV/AIDS or PTSD.
 - Why has public understanding of these issues changed, while other stigmas have remained?
- Have students research a variety of mental health myths and present their findings to the class. For example:
 - Mental illness is “in your head” and you should be able to fix it on your own.
 - People with mental illnesses are violent or delusional (e.g., hear voices).
 - People with mental illnesses need to take powerful medications.

Topic: Coping Strategies

Considerations

- As they go through puberty, students undergo a number of major physical, emotional, and social changes. Difficult situations in their lives can leave students feeling overwhelmed and cause them to experience high levels of stress.
- Each student will respond to stress in different ways. Some students may become quiet and withdrawn, and others may display disruptive behaviours such as arguing or having angry outbursts.
 - While some of these behaviours may be difficult to deal with, responding as calmly and positively as possible will make it easier to help students deal with their stress more productively.
 - If you notice new or unusual behaviours in a student, it is important not to overreact. Most of the stressors that students experience are temporary and do not lead to chronically high levels of stress.
- Focus on strengths.
 - Since adolescents are striving for independence, a focus on strengths resonates with them because it inspires empowerment and agency in relation to health.
 - There is plenty of research that points to the importance of focusing on mental health, as opposed to mental illness, to enhance psychosocial strengths, competencies, and ability to access resources. A narrow focus on mental illness isn't enough.

- Familiarize yourself with some of the ground-breaking discoveries made about the brain, especially about the positive influence of physical activity on both brain health and mental health, so you can make students aware of the benefits of physical activity for mental health.
- While these strategies can help many people, severe mental health issues are not a failure to properly use coping strategies. Some problems can be handled on our own but others may need outside help, such as counselling, therapy, or medication.

Instructional strategies

Strategies to support you in covering this topic with your students could include the following:

- Explain that people can improve both their physical and mental health through practice.
 - Just as we can get stronger by lifting weights, so can we reduce our stress levels by using the right coping strategies.
- Brainstorm a number of healthy and unhealthy ways to deal with stress. For example:
 - Healthy: being physically active, being outdoors, meditating, using various breathing techniques, doing yoga, getting a massage, spending time with pets, turning to family and friends for support, service learning, watching comedy, journalling, crafting, drawing and colouring, cooking, sleeping
 - Unhealthy: using drugs and alcohol, burying yourself in work, cutting yourself off from friends, bingeing (over-eating, over-exercising, binge drinking)
- Research coping strategies as a class and have students try one or more of them.
 - For example: box breathing (also known as square breathing), meditation, mindfulness, yoga, spending time outdoors, journalling, drawing and colouring, visualization, working out
 - Explain that everyone is different and that different strategies may work for one student but not another.
 - Have students discuss which activities they think they might use again.
 - Have students write a short reflection on an exit slip about their favourite coping strategies.

Responding to the unexpected in your classroom

When introduced to sensitive topics in your classroom, students may occasionally disclose sensitive information or ask unexpected questions.

- Students can express themselves in many different ways. Be aware of your responsibilities around disclosure about student self-harm. If you have concerns about a student, speak to your school counsellor.

Resources

- BC Crisis Centre: 1-800-784-2433 (1-800-SUICIDE), www.crisiscentre.bc.ca/ – available 24/7/365

- Bullying Canada: 1-877-352-4497 – available 24/7/365
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 – available 24/7/365
- Kids Help Phone texting service: text CONNECT to 686868 – available 24/7/365
- HealthLink BC: [HealthLink BC - 24/7 Health Advice You Can Trust](#)
 - [About 8-1-1 | HealthLink BC](#)
- Options for Sexual Health: <https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/>
- Youth Against Violence: 1-800-680-4264, info@youthagainstviolenceline.com – available 24/7/365 in multiple languages; resources available for teachers
- Youth in BC Online Chat: www.youthinbc.com/ – available 12 p.m.–1 a.m.
- Youth Space Text Line: 1-778-783-0177, www.youthspace.ca/ – online chat available 6 p.m.–12 a.m. PT

Information about reporting child abuse can be found at:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children/reporting-child-abuse>

To report child abuse and neglect in B.C., call 1-800-663-9122.