



Directing Change Lesson Plan: Mental Health

Lesson #1- Understanding Mental Health

Objectives: (1) Students will understand the mental health and the mental health continuum

Time: 45-60 minutes; up to 3 hours if including the movie activity

In-class Materials: Access to computer and large screen/projector to project PowerPoint presentation

Access to internet to access educational film

Printer to print optional hand-outs

Additional Resources:

- Contact local resources about scheduling a presentation on mental health. This could be a local organization, health educators from your local department of mental health or public health, or even a school counselor.
- Directing Change Mental Health Classroom presentation – https://directingchange.org/wp-content/uploads/Directing-Change-School-Presentation_MentalHealth.pptx
- Directing Change educational film:
 - Mental Health Continuum – <https://vimeo.com/464406251>
- Directing Change films:
 - “The Beauty of Mental Health” - <https://vimeo.com/394006785>
 - “Instinct” – <https://vimeo.com/209948795>
- Youth Mental Health Canada COVID-19 & Mental Health: A Student Mental Wellness Package – <https://ymhc.directingchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/YMHC-COVID19-mental-wellness-student-package.pdf>

ENGAGE

1. Show film: “Instinct” (1 min) – <https://vimeo.com/209948795>
 - **Discussion Question:** Research shows that half of all mental illnesses start by age 14 and three-quarters start by age 24. But, an average of 6 to 8 years go by after the symptoms of mental illness begin before young people get help. Why is that? Discuss.
2. Show students “The Beauty of Mental Health” (1 minute) and “The Mental Health Continuum” Educational Video (3.08 minutes)

Review mental health slides from Directing Change Classroom presentation or use these Talking Points:

Mental Health affects everyone, in every stage of life.

- *It is our emotional, psychological, and social well-being.*
- *It affects how we think, feel, and act.*
- *It helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.*

Everyone falls somewhere on the scale and our mental health can move anywhere on this spectrum throughout our life. When mental health challenges impact our daily life including going to school or work, relationships, and eating and sleeping patterns it is time to get help.

Discussion Question:

- **Discussion Question:** What are some things a young person might do to cope with challenging times? Note: Discuss healthy coping and unhealthy coping.
- **Discussion Question:** Sometimes when people are facing a mental health challenge, they don't tell other people or ask for support. Why do you think that is? What are some ways you could let your friends or classmates know that you are someone they can talk to about mental health challenges?

3. Show film "Good Medicine": <https://vimeo.com/258036872>

- **Discussion Question:** What are some negative ways young people may cope with tough times? What are good ways to maintain our mental health and take care of ourselves?

DO/EXPERIENCE

Complete at least one of these activities.

Activity #1: Mental Wellness Rays

Activity #2: Hope Journaling Activity

Activity #3: Mental Health Movie Activity

APPLY

Ask students what they can do this week to improve their mental health and well-being.

REFLECT

- 1) Ask students: Reflect on what you thought mental health meant before we did this lesson. Has your concept of mental health changed? For example, did the phrase "mental health" automatically make you think of illness, rather than the whole spectrum of wellness?



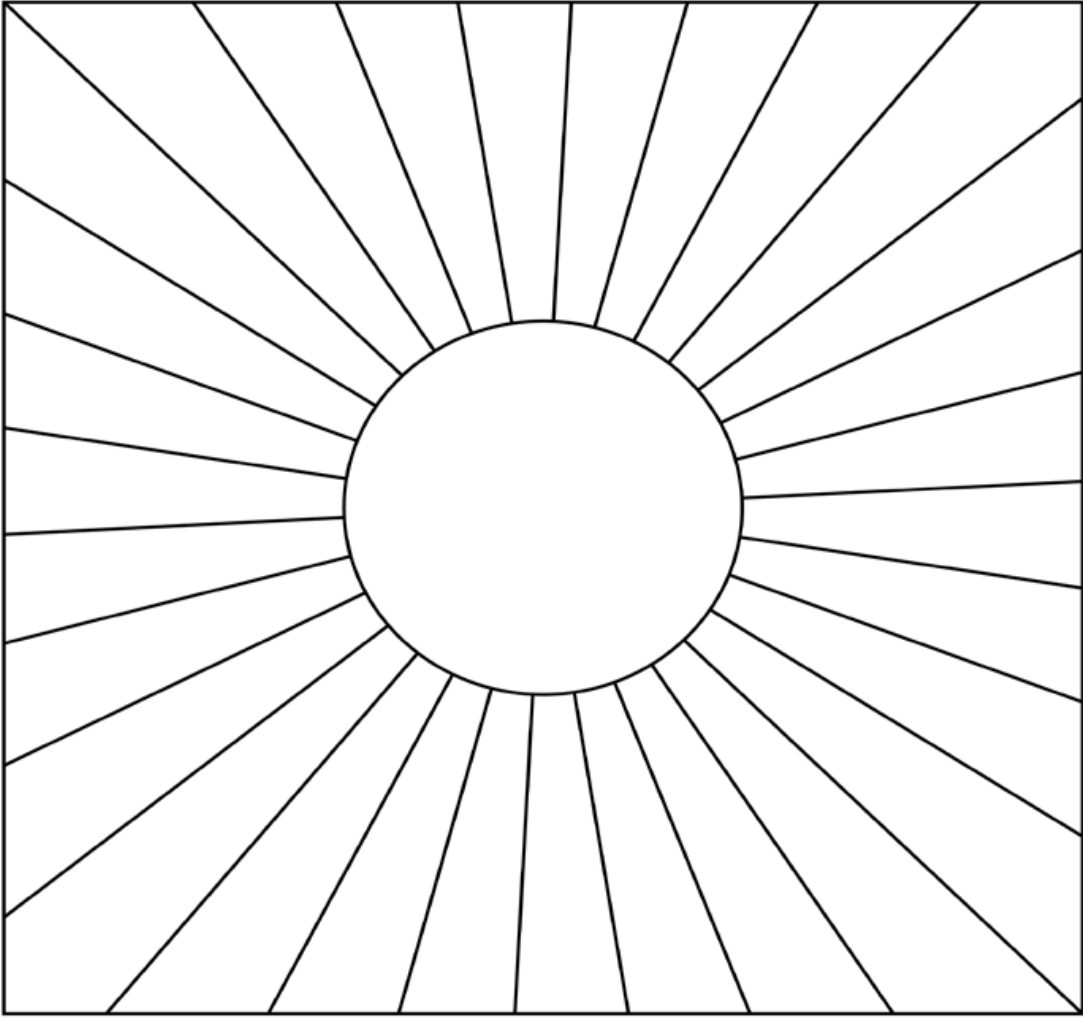
Assignment Ideas:

- Assign a journaling activity using the writing prompts from Activity 3.
- Ask students to interview someone in their life and find out how they take care of their mental health. What helps them feel better when they are going through a tough time?

ACTIVITY #1 (DO/EXPERIENCE): Mental Wellness Rays

Adapted from Youth Mental Health Canada's COVID19 & Mental Health

- 1) Ask students to think about “wellness.” See if they can come up with a definition for what it means to be well. How can you tell that you are well?
 - a. You can choose to provide a given definition. One definition from [UC Davis' Student Health and Counseling Services](#) is this: “Wellness is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a healthy and fulfilling life. Wellness is more than being free from illness, it is a dynamic process of change and growth.”
 - b. The World Health Organization defines health as: "...a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."
 - c. The National Wellness Institute defines wellness as: "a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential."
- 2) Explain that we might be feeling extra emotions right now around life changes due to COVID-19, distance learning, wildfires, social injustice, or any personal changes happening within our lives. Learning how to talk about and cope with these big feelings is important in order to keep growing as people.
- 3) Distribute the attached graphic. Ask the following questions to guide their creation of their “rays of wellness”. Tell students to think about the different areas of wellness: social, physical, emotional, academic/intellectual, spiritual, financial, and environmental.
 - What motivates you?
 - What are you passionate about?
 - What makes you happy?
- 4) Have students write each of these ideas into a ray of their sun. They can color in and decorate the rays if materials and time permit.
- 5) Have students share out their art pieces with a partner (or with the whole group). Was there a lot of overlap in answers for their rays of wellness? Did talking to someone else and seeing their rays give you some ideas for building out your own rays?
- 6) Talk to students about how to use this “rays of wellness” handout once they have finished it: they can post it in their bedroom or where they are taking classes, to remind themselves of parts of their lives that make them feel well. They can also use the handout to talk to their families or friends about their own methods of feeling well.





ACTIVITY #2 (DO/EXPERIENCE): Journaling

What you'll need:

- Journal. If you're unable to purchase a journal, you can learn how to make one using only one piece of paper [here](#).
- Items youth can use to decorate their journal such as coloring utensils, stickers, magazines and glitter.
- Writing utensil.

Follow these steps to do the journal bookmark activity:

1. To start, provide youth with their journal and items to decorate. Instruct youth to decorate the outside of their journal in a way that represents them. This is their space to dream, think and be whatever they want. They could utilize magazine clippings to make a collage or simply decorate with coloring utensils.
2. From here, pick the number of days that you'd like to have the youth journal. This could be as much as every day or as little as two days per week. Begin their journaling days by either giving them a prompt off of their bookmark or allowing them to choose a prompt themselves. Allow youth five to ten minutes to think and write about their prompt.
3. If in a group or being done as an individual, after they have had time to write in their journal, follow-up with a discussion. This provides youth with the opportunity for shared learning amongst peers or others. Although this is encouraged, be mindful that their journal is their sacred space and do not push for sharing if it is not welcomed.

Writing Prompts:

- Describe one of the happiest moments in your life? Why was it so happy?
- What is your wildest dream? Imagine anything is possible!
- Who is your best friend and how do they make you feel?
- Can someone turn a weakness into a strength over time? How?
- Write about a moment when you felt loved. What made you feel loved?
- What is the best advice you have ever been given?
- Body scan: write down everything that is happening around you at this moment. Write down what you see, hear, smell, feel.
- Write about a person who you'd like to be like someday. What is special about this person?
- What is one thing you would like to get better at?
- What are three things that make you feel better when you are feeling down?
- Write about a unique quality you have that makes you "special".
- When was the last time you helped someone else? How did that make you feel?
- What is something that you have done that you are proud of? Why are you proud of it?
- Who do you talk to when you have a problem? How do they help?

- How can you tell that you're getting angry? What does your body feel like? What helps you not be angry anymore?

Additional Resources:

For additional resources for parents and educators visit the Each Mind Matters collection here

- [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#)
- [The Health Benefits of Journaling](#)
- [Journaling as a Social Emotional Learning Practice](#)
- [15 Activities for Teaching SEL](#)
- [Free Sample of Social Emotional Learning Journal for Distance Learning for 5th and 6th grade](#)
- [Sources of Strength: Reflect + Connect: Seven Days of Journal Prompts](#)



ACTIVITY #3 (DO/EXPERIENCE): Mental Health Movie Activity

- 1) Choose between these two films: *Inside Out* (recommended for elementary/middle school) or *It's Kind of a Funny Story* (recommended for high school/college audiences).
- 2) Follow the facilitation guide found at the end of this lesson plan for each film. Make sure to talk about norms for your classroom before beginning the film.
- 3) Have students go through the discussion questions in small groups or as a whole class.

Inside Out Facilitation Guide

Adapted from Each Mind Matters' Mental Health Movie Activity Facilitation Guide

This activity is designed for students in 4th – 8th grades, to increase students' mental health awareness and empower them to seek help if needed. A link to the film, the film's synopsis and a short, 60-second Directing Change public service announcement (PSA) are provided to drive discussion. Accompanying facilitation guide and discussion questions have been provided to help facilitate the activity and dialogue about mental health. After the discussion concludes, students can self-evaluate to see how this activity has helped them better understand mental health.

Inside Out:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azZJ29kQ1cY>

Length: 95 min. (PG)

Riley is an 11-year-old who has felt a lot of Joy in her life until her family moves away from their hometown. Riley's emotions are characters who reveal the Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust that she sometimes feels as she grieves the life she knew before and struggles to adapt to the new life she must come to know.

Directing Change PSA: Not Alone

https://youtu.be/R8G_FxZOWLM

With the help of his basketball team, an African American youth is reminded of his own strength, that he is not alone, and that there is help.

Introduce the Activity:

1. Introduce that this activity is about learning to accept life changes and to cope with all the emotions and challenges that change can bring. We might be feeling extra emotions around life changes due to covid-19, distance learning, wildfires, social injustice, or any personal changes happening within our lives. Learning how to talk about and cope with these big feelings is important in order to keep growing as people.

2. Review your classroom's norms to ensure that students feel respected and safe.

3. Help students focus during the film with these prompts. If setting allows, write Feelings, Self-Talk, and Coping Strategies on the board or a poster and encourage talking notes.

- To keep the storyline manageable, *Inside Out* represents the complex range of human emotions as a combination of five main characters. As you watch the film, write down other emotions you see Riley experience. Create feeling clusters by grouping other feelings you observe with each of the five main characters.
- Write down examples of messages Joy and Sadness say to themselves (self-talk) when something difficult happens, e.g. Sadness tells herself, “I only make everything worse,” and Joy repeats, “It’s all great” or “Think of something funny.”
- Write down coping strategies that you see Riley use throughout the film. Mark which strategies you think are effective in helping Riley to cope better with her situation and which strategies create more difficulties or cause her to feel worse.

Watch the Film:

1. Riley’s Dream World features a clown nightmare that may upset some students. Check in before the film begins to see if anyone has a fear of clowns, then signal those students just before the 55-minute mark (when Joy and Sadness descend into Riley’s darkest fears) to look away or step outside for about 5 minutes. The clown scene is just a plot device and is not needed for meaningful participation in this lesson.

2. If students need a body break or you wish to pause to begin discussing any of the questions, a good time to do so would be right when Joy and Sadness get sucked into Long Term Memory, about 25 minutes into the film. Another natural stopping point is after Sadness comforts Bing Bong, and he gets up to lead them to the train, around the 50-minute mark.

Discuss:

Choose questions from this list below to guide a discussion. Modify, as needed, for your group.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. From the time Riley is born, Joy is uncomfortable with Sadness. She literally tries to contain Sadness inside the chalk circle, and late in the film, Joy tells Sadness, “You’re hurting Riley.” Do you think people tend to embrace or reject their Sadness? Why do you believe it can be difficult for people to accept feelings other than Joy? Is there more stigma around Sadness or depression, in particular?
2. Joy understands that Fear, Disgust, and Anger all function to protect Riley in some way, but she isn’t sure what Sadness does. What does Joy learn about the value of Sadness from watching her talk with Bing Bong or when Riley lost her hockey game?
3. Joy tends to be optimistic no matter what and wants Riley to be happy all the time. She thinks a perfect day is one with mostly joyful memories, and when the memory wall shifts more toward Sadness, Fear, Disgust, and Anger, Joy is clearly upset. Is it a realistic expectation to feel Joy more than any other emotions? Why or why not? Are there ways that being positive all the time can negatively affect our emotional well-being?
4. After they move, Riley’s mom tells her:



"I really want to say... thank you... Through all this confusion, you've stayed... our happy girl. Your dad's under a lot of pressure, but if you and I can keep smiling, it would be a big help. We can do that for him. Right?"

What effect do her mom's words have on Riley's ability to express and cope with her feelings? Is it healthy to ask Riley to stay happy and keep smiling for someone else?

5. *Inside Out* explores how Sadness can help us become more whole, complex emotional beings. At what point does Sadness cross over into depression and require help? What are some signs to look for in yourself or others that support might be needed?
6. One of the most important scenes in the film is when Joy hands the core memories to Sadness, and Riley finally breaks down and confesses how she feels to her parents: *"I know you don't want me to, but... I miss home... You need me to be happy, but... I want my old friends, and my hockey team. I want to go home. Please don't be mad."*

How do her parents respond to what she shares? What does it mean that she produces her first multicolored memory ball? What does the film say about accepting our own feelings and having our feelings accepted by our families?

EVALUATION

	Strongly disagree 👎	Disagree	Neutral/ Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree 👍
1. This activity made me more aware of my own attitudes about mental health and people who experience mental health challenges.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am more informed about where to seek help and support for a mental health problem if I need it.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am more likely to reach out and help someone else who is struggling with a mental health problem after doing this activity.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I plan on changing the way I talk about mental health and mental illness after participating in this activity.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I learned something that I'll share with a friend in the future.	1	2	3	4	5

6. Do you have other comments you'd like to share?

It's Kind of a Funny Story Facilitation Guide

Adapted from Each Mind Matters' Mental Health Movie Activity Facilitation Guide

This activity is designed for students in 9th grade through college, to increase students' mental health awareness and empower them to seek help if needed. A link to the film, the film's synopsis and a 60-second Directing Change public service announcement (PSA) are provided to drive discussion. Accompanying discussion questions have been provided to help facilitate the activity and dialogue about mental health. After the discussion concludes, students can self-evaluate to see how this activity has helped them better understand mental health.

It's Kind of a Funny Story

<https://www.amazon.com/Kind-Funny-Story-Keir-Gilchrist/dp/B004GBFF5Y>

Length: 101 min. (PG-13).

A clinically depressed teenager, Craig (Keir Gilchrist) gets a new start after he checks himself into an adult psychiatric ward, forming close bonds with other patients, Bobby (Zach Galifianakis) and Noelle (Emma Roberts).

Directing Change PSA: A New Tomorrow

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFFICLJNbQ8>

When one friend begins showing warning signs for suicide, a friend notices and seeks the help of a school counselor.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Before Craig checked himself into a hospital, what were the signs and symptoms he was experiencing?
2. How did Craig internalize peer pressure and stigma he felt about having a mental health challenge?
3. Who were the individuals in Craig's life that made up his support system?
4. Do you have a support system you can count on? In what ways have you been supported by/provided support to a loved one?
5. How does Craig's honesty about his mental health challenges help others talk about their struggles?
6. How did art serve as a positive outlet in Craig's life? What positive outlets do you have in your life?
7. What did Craig take away from his experience in the hospital?



EVALUATION

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements using a scale of 1 to 5 with “1” being strongly disagree and “5” being strongly agree.

	Strongly disagree 	Disagree	Neutral/ Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree 
1. This activity made me more aware of my own attitudes about mental health and people who experience mental health challenges.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am more informed about where to seek help and support for a mental health problem if I need it.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am more likely to reach out and help someone else who is struggling with a mental health problem after doing this activity.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I plan on changing the way I talk about mental health and mental illness after participating in this activity.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I learned something that I'll share with a friend in the future.	1	2	3	4	5

6. Do you have other comments you'd like to share?