



## Directing Change Lesson Plan: Mental Illness and Stigma

### Lesson #1- Understanding Mental Illness and Stigma

**Objectives:** (1) Students will understand stereotypes about people experiencing mental illness and how this can prevent people from seeking help.

**Time:** 45 minutes to 3 hours, depending on activities chosen

**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 educational film:
  - Mental Illness and Stigma - <https://vimeo.com/464406658>
- Directing Change films
  - “If We All Speak Loud Enough” - <https://vimeo.com/92756723>
  - “You are You” - <https://vimeo.com/394714757>
  - “We Don’t Do That” - <https://vimeo.com/394966078>
  - “Break the Stigma” - <https://vimeo.com/307119494>

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### **ENGAGE**

- **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.

Talking Points:

**What does stigma mean?** “An attribute that is deeply discrediting and that reduces the bearer from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.” Stigma is a Greek word that originally referred to a kind of mark that was cut or burned into the skin. It identified people as criminals, slaves, or traitors to be shunned. At its core, stigma is caused by three root problems: ignorance, prejudice, and discrimination.

**What does stigma look like?** Stigma can exist within societies, institutions, cultures, and individuals, including people who are living with mental illness themselves (this is called self-stigma). Internally, stigma is caused by mistaken thoughts and beliefs that lead to prejudiced attitudes. Stigma often takes the outward form of discrimination, when people are treated differently or denied rights because of their mental illness.

1) Show students “Mental Illness & Stigma” Educational Video (4 minutes):  
<https://vimeo.com/464406658>

2) Show films –

- “If We All Speak Loud Enough” - <https://vimeo.com/92756723>
- “You are You”- <https://vimeo.com/394714757>
- “We Don’t Do That” - <https://vimeo.com/394966078>
  - **Discussion Question:** When people internalize stigma, what are some of the fears expressed in the films?
  - **Discussion Question:** What are some things we can do to fight against stigma?

3) Show film: “Break the Stigma” - <https://vimeo.com/307119494>

- **Discussion Question:** What suggestions do they present for breaking the stigma? Were there any other actions you can think of, after watching this film, for how to help reduce stigma around mental illness in your community?

## DO/EXPERIENCE

Activity #1: Mental Health and the Media

- 1) Ask students to read the *It’s Up to US* article “Lights, Camera, Action: Media Can Help Shape a Positive Image for Mental Illness”.  
[https://directingchange.ca.org/wp-content/uploads/itsuptous\\_spring2014-1.pdf](https://directingchange.ca.org/wp-content/uploads/itsuptous_spring2014-1.pdf)
- 2) Ask students: When you watch depictions of mental illness, ask yourself: Why do you think people with a mental illness are portrayed like that? Does it mesh with your own views? Is it accurate? Do you know anyone with a mental illness who is like that? Can you think of examples of TV shows or movies that you’ve seen that portray mental illness or suicide?

Activity #2: A New State of Mind

Watch the 1-hour documentary (<https://vimeo.com/67439197>) narrated by Glenn Close, which takes a look at the lives of several individuals who have been impacted by stigma and mental illness.

## APPLY

Ask students what they can do this week to help reduce the stigma related to mental health.

Note to teacher: Challenge students to think about the way they talk about mental health challenges. Other answers may include learning more about mental illnesses, listening to others’ experiences, and speaking out when people are saying stigmatizing statements.



### **REFLECT**

- 1) Ask students: Reflect on your own thoughts and preconceived ideas about mental illness and people with mental illness. What was the most surprising thing you learned about mental health or stigma today?
- 2) Have there been other social issues or health conditions that have been affected by stigma? How have these views changed over the years, and how did those social norms change?

### **Assignment Ideas:**

- Have students find newspaper articles that talk about mental illness.
- Have students write a letter to the editor with a reaction to the piece.