RESOURCE GUIDE

MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT
FOR TEACHERS

National Alliance on Mental Illness
South Dakota
Stigma continues to be a huge problem for people living with mental illness. It undermines a person’s sense of self, relationships, well-being and prospects for recovery. Communities make a difference through education and awareness programs.

There is a lingering perception that it’s a person’s own fault if he or she suffers from mental illness. Mental illness has been wrongfully characterized as a weakness or character flaw, as something people bring upon themselves or their children and as something that people use to get attention. Yet, mental illness occurs all over the world, in all races, in all cultures and in all social classes.

Many people are frightened of mental illness, although about one in four people will require professional help for a mental health problem at some time in their lives. Providing accurate information can help correct fears, myths and misconceptions many people have about mental illness. Studies have shown that a combination of education and face-to-face interaction has a greater impact on changing attitudes than using either strategy in isolation. Stigma is diminished when someone meets a person with mental illness who contributes to the life of the community. Negative perceptions can change when people have positive interactions with individuals with mental illness.
The words you use matter. You can better reach youth, breakdown negative stereotypes and give teens hope by choosing words that are more relatable and promote understanding. This simple but caring approach may help youth feel more comfortable and willing to talk openly about mental health and to reach out for support.

Your presentation will resonate more effectively and honestly by choosing the best words for your audience. Included here are suggested words and phrases to help teens be more open and receptive to your message. It only takes one person to make a difference.

Lead by example. Be that person.

**A person is not their mental health condition. You wouldn’t say someone "is cancer," so we wouldn’t say someone "is bipolar." Use words like "has," "lives with" or "experiences" instead. Talk about mental health in a way that encourages hope and empowers youth. Words like "brain disorder/disease," "mentally ill" and "suffers from" can be intimidating to teens and gives the illness the power.**

**Tips for Talking to Youth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consider saying</th>
<th>Instead of saying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental health condition</td>
<td>Brain disorder or brain disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>Mental illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My daughter has bipolar disorder</td>
<td>My daughter is bipolar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives with, has or experiences</td>
<td>Suffers from, afflicted with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. **TAKE TIME TO DE-STRESS**

   Everyone has their own de-stressors, the things that make them instantly relax and feel rejuvenated.

   Some ideas for an immediate stress reliever:
   - Go for a 10-minute walk.
   - Close your eyes and take ten deep breaths.
   - Visualize a pleasing scene, like a calm beach.
   - Put on some soothing music.
   - Do some coloring. Repetitive motions, like those used when coloring, cross-stitching, or making jewelry have been proven to reduce anxiety.

   Whatever your go-to de-stress activity is, make sure that is a priority each and every day.

2. **HAVE A CHAT**

   Talking over issues you are having at work, with a colleague, or any issues is a great way to resolve a problem. Sometimes just talking over something out loud can help you untangle a tricky issue, and your conversation partner might help you see something from a different point of view! If you don’t feel comfortable talking to someone at work, see if your school has an Employee Assistance Program that can give you an objective ear to talk to.

3. **Take Care of your Physical Wellbeing**

   Studies have shown a close link between your physical and mental health. There are a plethora of articles on the internet providing tips and advice on how to nourish your physical wellbeing. Some of the major things to take care of include:
   - Getting enough sleep. A good night’s sleep can boost productivity during the daylight hours so that you’ll be working smarter, not harder.
   - Eat a balanced diet. Eating a balanced diet provides your body (including your brain) with the nutrients it needs to function properly. Don’t forget to drink plenty of water!
   - Be active. Exercise produces endorphins which send a boost of positivity to your brain.

4. **Have a Good Work/Life Balance**

   Switch Off Your Email: Being available online 24/7 can open you up to communications that can leave you excited or stressed about work, which can shift the mood of your whole weekend. Remember to set a boundary.

   Set Realistic Expectations – It’s OK to Say ‘No’:
   While teachers are amazing multitaskers, we are also mere humans. People will understand if you are unable to take on another responsibility.

5. **YOUR OWN WELLNESS**

   The term “school mental health” is typically used to discuss the mental health and wellness of students. However, school mental health also includes promoting the well-being of school-based educators, administrators, and mental health workers.

   Here are 5 tips for teacher wellbeing:
If you’re unfamiliar with the concept of mindfulness, it involves actively and intentionally focusing on the present moment. Being aware of the things around you and the physical and emotional sensations that your body is experiencing.

Mindfulness is as simple as observing your class and each child without judgment. Your class doesn't have to be perfectly still and quiet for you to do this! Mindfulness is not about being in a completely serene and peaceful environment. It is about finding the calm among the chaos. The benefits of teaching mindfulness to your class include increased focus, reduced stress, and improvement in academic performance.

SAMHSA 8 DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS

- **EMOTIONAL** Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships
- **FINANCIAL** Satisfaction with current and future financial situations.
- **SOCIAL** Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system.
- **SPIRITUAL** Expanding our sense of purpose and meaning in life
- **OCCUPATIONAL** Personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from one's work.
- **PHYSICAL** Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, sleep, and nutrition.
- **INTELLECTUAL** Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills
- **ENVIRONMENTAL** Good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being.
For Teachers: Supporting kids’ mental health. There is a lot to worry about right now. Grown-ups are feeling it, and kids and teens are feeling it, too. Unsurprisingly anxiety is on the rise. Whether you have a kindergartner or a high school senior, they may need you to help calm their concerns. Here’s how:

- **Combat fears with facts**: kids need facts to feel better
- **Revisit lessons on fake news**: you can give them facts, but more importantly, you can arm them with the ability to distinguish truth from rumors on the internet.
- **Don’t pretend it isn’t happening**: “Talk about it, don’t avoid it. Explaining what is happening and what this means for us because a lot of anxiety arises from lack of knowledge.”
- **Don’t let virtual learning add to the anxiety**: This is the first time both kids and teachers are doing virtual learning. Don’t be that teacher who overloads them with three times the amount of work they are used to in person. Kids need a clear outline, deadlines that make sense, and uncomplicated steps to access and succeed with technology.
- **Encourage virtual connection**: Just because kids are stuck at home doesn’t mean they need to lose social connection. Some classes are hosting virtual playdates or hangouts on Zoom, Skype and Google Hangouts.
- **Be vigilant about mental health red flags**: Remember all of your mental health training now more than ever. Cultivate ways for your kids to express their thoughts and concerns. Check on your at-risk kids, or those who you know have struggled previously with mental health concerns. This could be simple: a post-card in the mail, an email, a phone call home.

---

**RESOURCES:**

(click on logo to access link)

- **South Dakota Parent Connection**
- **NAMI South Dakota**
- **SDSP South Dakota Suicide Prevention**
STUDENT WELLNESS

**Tools for Tough Times**
Arm your students with the tools to cope through tough times.

**QuaranTeen Series**
Helpful tips for teens created by Bring Change 2 Mind and delivered by teens for teens.

**Virtual Activities**

**'This is Normal' Podcast**
Podcast where young people talk about their own mental health challenges -- and how they got through them. Because when we share our stories, we can all feel a little less alone.