Let’s Talk
A mental health program for Canadian youth

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MediaSmarts is a Canadian not-for-profit centre for digital and media literacy.

Its vision is to ensure that young people have the critical thinking skills to engage with media as active and informed digital citizens.
Kids Help Phone is Canada’s leading online and phone counselling service for young people ages five to 20.

All services are free, anonymous and confidential and available across Canada in English and French, 24/7.

**Let’s Talk**

A mental health program for Canadian youth

**Objective:**

The objective is to reduce the stigma about mental health and talking about mental health by introducing a national school program for youth based on media literacy and promoting help-seeking (Grades 7-10)
Bilingual program developed to help students in grades 7-8:
  • Better understand media’s influence on our understanding of, and attitudes towards, mental health and mental illness;
  • Develop skills for finding authoritative sources of mental health information on the Internet; and
  • Cultivate safe and effective help-seeking behaviours for mental health issues.

Designed for Health teachers as well as for subjects with media literacy outcomes, such as English, Media Arts, and Social Studies.

Includes both teacher training and classroom resources:
  • Classroom resources
    • Setting the Record Straight: Public Service Announcements on Mental Health (Grades 7-8)
    • Setting the Record Straight: Authenticating Mental Health Information Online (Grades 7-8)
    • Seeking Help (Grades 7-8)
    • Mental Health presentation for students
  • Teacher training resources
    • Self-directed professional development presentation
    • Teachers’ guide

Program framework

Modular multi-disciplinary approach:

• Foster critical thinking about the portrayal of mental health and mental illness in the media
• Teach skills for finding authoritative sources of information and understanding stigma
• Familiarize students with the range of formal and informal mental health supports available
• Demystify formal help-seeking
• Open doors
Benefits of a media literacy approach:

- Expands lessons from health subject to arts (language arts classes or media/visual arts)
- Natural opportunities to discuss stigma
- Media lens provides safe environment – learn about mental health facts with a focus on media examples, not personal

“Stereotypes of people with mental illness are just as inaccurate and dehumanizing as stereotypes of women, racial minorities, people with physical and developmental disabilities, and people from other diverse groups.”

Talking About Mental Illness
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Pilot program overview
Grades 7-8

Materials:
• Tutorial and guide with background information for educators
• Three lesson plans
• Student handouts and activity sheets
• Interactive student quiz
• Parent information sheet
• Materials available online for download as well as printed kits

Program Partners

Promotion: Canadian Teachers’ Federation
Consultation:
• Canadian Mental Health Commission
• National Infant, Child and Youth Consortium
• Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health
• School-Based Mental Health and Substance Abuse Consortium
• School Mental Health ASSIST
• Youth Net at CHEO (Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario)
Pilot program evaluation

- Led by research team from the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services at the University of Ottawa
- Conducted in Ontario and Quebec in 2013-2014 school year
  - CSDCEO (Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'Est ontarien)
    - Implemented the lesson Setting the Record Straight: Public Service Announcements on Mental Health
  - OCDSB (Ottawa-Carleton District School Board)
    - Implemented the lesson Setting the Record Straight: Authenticating Mental Health Information Online
  - TDSB (Toronto District School Board)
    - Implemented the lesson Seeking Help
  - Externat Saint-Jean-Eudes (independent school in Quebec)
    - Implemented the lesson Seeking Help

- 22 teachers and 669 students participated – evaluation based on 325 students who provided necessary consent and completed all three tests
What is mental health?
“What does it take to become mentally well?”
Youth Net participant

MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH
- Strengths
- Resiliency
- Attachment

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM
- Stresses at school, home and/or work

MENTAL ILLNESS
- Internalizing (mood/anxiety disorders)
- Externalizing
- Psychoses
- Substance use

Source: Mental Health Literacy Workshop
Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health

Youth mental health
- One in six youth have a mental health problem
- One half of those youth have more than one issue

Sources:
School Mental Health ASSIST. Mental Health Awareness in Ontario School Boards, 2012.
Barriers to seeking help

Young people...

- May feel their problems aren’t serious enough to need help
- May feel they should deal with their problems themselves
- May be unaware of the resources available for seeking help
- May be uncomfortable talking to family and friends
- May worry about confidentiality when seeking help
- May fear stigma

Only 1 in 5 Canadian children who need help receive it.

Source: Darcy A. Santor · Christiane Poulin · John C. LeBlanc · Vivek Kusumakar (2007), Facilitating Help Seeking Behavior and Referrals for Mental Health Difficulties in School Aged Boys and Girls: A School-Based Intervention (pg. 172)

Stigma

“There’s so much pressure nowadays to be perfect. You can’t put anything negative on your Facebook page or your Twitter wall (sic) because then you won’t get into university… A lot of people view being mentally ill as being imperfect.”

Youth Net focus group participant
Effects of stigma

On individuals:
- Marginalization, alienation and exclusion
- Can make mental health issues worse
- Can lead to feeling shame or blaming oneself
- Less likely to seek or offer help or support

Fighting stigma

- Use respectful language
- Watch for and address misleading media portrayals
- Be accepting and supportive of people with mental health issues
- Confront and unpack stereotypes and misinformation
- Promote mental health education
Talking about it

Educators feel ill-prepared to identify, understand and manage student mental health problems at school.

Scanning the Practice Landscape in School-Based Mental Health

Schools and youth mental health
The Respectful Classroom

- Use ordinary language
- Focus on the mental health continuum

"You have OCD."

"I'm going to kill myself if..."

"I'm so anxious all the time."

"[I hate] when it's misused and when it's used every day by the same person."

"The other one I hear a lot is the word anorexic used incorrectly. People go 'I want to lose weight, I'm going to go anorexic for a week.'"

"They may be respectful and use the proper terms around you, but they'll go behind your back and talk to other people about things and mislead them with the wrong information."

YouthNet focus group participants

Adapted from:
Talking About Mental Illness: A guide for developing an awareness program for youth (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)
Telling is Risky Business: Mental Health Consumers Confront Stigma. Otto Wahl, Rutgers University Press, 1999
Student disclosure

- Review all resources before delivering the lesson and follow the lesson plan
- Remind students the lesson is not about personal concerns
- Be aware of students’ backgrounds and mental health concerns

Minimizing the risk of disclosure
## Lesson plans (Phase 1- Pilot) Grades 7-8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting the Record Straight: <em>Getting the Goods on Mental Health</em></th>
<th>Setting the Record Straight: <em>Public Service Announcements on Mental Illness</em></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Evaluating the reliability of sources of information online about mental health</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Analyze several good sources of information on MH in order to recognize the markers of a reliable source</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Students investigate the popular myths about MH</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting the Record Straight: <em>Public Service Announcements on Mental Illness</em></td>
<td>• Students learn about the difference between commercial advertising and public service campaigns</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Students create public service ads to correct the misperceptions of mental illness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental Health Resources: <em>Social Support Network and Help-Seeking</em></td>
<td>• Students brainstorm about their social support network, the types of formal mental health resources that are available in their community and when/how a young person would access these supports</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The class makes a live call and/or chat to a Kids Help Phone counsellor and asks questions about their service, engaging students in a safe conversation with a counsellor.</td>
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**Lesson 1 (Grades 7-8)**

*Setting the Record Straight: Getting the Goods on Mental Health*
"I go on the site [WebMD] everyday… and I’ve been told I have everything from leukemia to genital herpes… It give you suggested systems like ‘Is your scalp itchy’ and then you’re like, ‘Oh my God, yes it is.’"

"I identify as transgender, so what I usually do is I go on Tumblr and there’ll be news feeds of tips, very positive ones, ‘Do this in a certain way and don’t do this, that’ll actually harm you in the long run’ -- but you have to go find the right ones at the beginning, I don’t remember how to get that.”

YouthNet focus group participants

Lesson 1
Setting the Record Straight:
Getting the Goods on Mental Health
Lesson 2 (Grades 7-8)

Setting the Record Straight:
Public Service Announcements on Mental Illness
PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST THE SWINE FLU
WASH YOUR HANDS

IT'S THIS EASY TO PICK UP RABBIES

- Rabies is a deadly disease transmitted in saliva
- Cats and dogs are infected with rabies by wild animals every year
- Bites from unvaccinated pets and wild animals cause most human exposures, but
  - Rabies can be preventable

Protect yourself, your pet and your community:
- Vaccinate all dogs, cats and ferrets against rabies
- Avoid contact with wildlife and stray animals
- If bitten, wash the wound thoroughly, see your doctor

Working Together to Make Rabies History! WorldRabiesDay.org
Lesson 3 (Grades 7-8)

Social Support Network and Help-Seeking

Support in Your Communities
No One is Alone

Pilot program evaluation
Research questions

1. To what extent were the self-directed tutorials and classroom materials adequate in preparing teachers to teach the Let's Talk: Finding Reliable Mental Health Information and Resources lessons? How could the training be improved?

2. To what extent were training and program materials culturally relevant across selected pilot sites?

3. Were the resources provided to teachers by the school or school board sufficient to implement/teach lesson plans? Were resources adequate to support student mental health concerns?

4. To what extent were students engaged with the learning modules? What did they like most and least?

5. To what extent had students' ability to understand media's influence on their understanding of, and attitude towards, mental health increased?

6. To what extent had the program enabled students to be able to identify support networks available to them in the community and to cultivate help-seeking behaviours for mental health issues?

7. To what extent had the program enabled students to find authoritative sources of mental health information on the Internet?

8. To what extent had the program enabled students to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the Internet as a research tool?

Feedback: Teacher training materials

Qualitative research was done with the teachers through an online survey and in-depth interviews. Overall, teachers were very satisfied. The entire qualitative sample had positive answers and viewpoints to share:

• Teachers were very satisfied with the teacher training presentation and guide

• Felt strongly that the information was well presented and appreciated how the details were packaged

• Materials were very thorough and easy to follow

• Appreciated having a combination of online and print components for their training and teaching purposes

“I appreciated the terminology, just making sure I was clear in my mind what the appropriate and correct terminology was for various things before I talked to the kids. For example, stigma is not a word we used a lot in regular conversation, so it was something we had to talk about. I think it was good going over the terms.”
Suggestions

Teachers also offered constructive suggestions for enhancing the training component. These include:

• Providing scenarios and case studies to help visualize and model possible issues that may arise in class
• Adding an introductory video
• Ensuring that, if needed, teachers have support from school professionals such as guidance counsellors, school psychologists, social workers and principals
• Providing opportunities for face-to-face workshops in addition to the self-directed materials

“The handbook was the most useful because it guided me through everything that I needed to do and encouraged me to ask the students questions. I liked having it with me when they asked me questions too. I felt that a lot of the information I needed when they asked me questions was there for me.”

General feedback: Lessons and PowerPoint for students

• All of the teachers reported that students were highly interested in, and engaged with, the learning modules
• Majority of teachers very satisfied with the lessons and the mental health presentation for students.
• Lesson materials frequently mentioned as being fun and interactive
• Video, phone calls, quizzes and online research inspired participation

“The student PowerPoint presentation and lesson were very thorough and explicit. It hit the target audience really well in terms of appeal and it was very logical in addressing complex issues in an easy way. At first students were skeptical and guarded because they didn’t know what I would be teaching them. The visuals broke down those barriers and helped communicate to the kids what mental health is. It helped that the term was explained in the context of one’s overall health.”
Quantitative results: Lesson plans

Authenticating Mental Health Information Online
- Significant increase in the understanding of the Internet as a valuable research tool for mental health issues
- Students improved in their ability to find and authenticate mental health information websites
- 30% of students indicated they had used the Internet to look up mental health information by the post-post test

PSA on Mental Health and Illness
- Students understanding of mental illness significantly increased
- Students understanding of advertising and the persuasive purposes of media products grew between the pre- and post-post tests

Seeking Help
- Significant increase in students’ understanding of mental illness
- Students’ confidence in knowing who to talk to if they had a problem rose
- 33% more students identified Kids Help Phone as someone they could and would approach for support (significant increase in knowledge of Kids Help Phone)
- Increased students awareness of other sources of formal and informal support

Researchers’ recommendations

Teacher Training & Support
1. Provide more in-depth teacher training on mental health scenarios, mental health vocabulary and media literacy.
2. Provide more student scenarios to teachers in their training so that they may better respond to identified student needs.
3. Include a variety of school professionals, outside of teachers, as resources in the roll out of this program (for example: guidance counsellors, school psychologists, social workers and principals).
4. Encourage teachers to follow through in teaching all three lessons to ensure that their students develop a thorough understanding of mental health resources.
5. Encourage a follow-up with students over the school year in the use of Kids Help Phone.

Lesson Plans
6. Simplify mental health terminology where possible in program messaging for both teachers and students.
7. Consider modernizing the student PowerPoint presentation by offering a more engaging option such as a Prezi presentation or a video.
8. Enhance lesson materials wherever possible using questions to encourage open discussion amongst students.
Researchers’ recommendations

Other
1. Amalgamate the teacher training guide and teacher training presentation in the interests of teachers’ time constraints.

Next steps
Other resources

How much do you **know** about diversity in video games?

Find out by answering fifteen questions about how visible minorities, gays and lesbians, Aboriginals, persons with disabilities and religions are portrayed in video games.

Take Quiz