

changing minds



YOUTH DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT CHANGING MINDS

EVEN IF THERE were twice as many real mental health stories being told, it still wouldn't be enough. That's why we – Community Access – launched Changing Minds, a unique storytelling initiative that helps young people (ages 15 to 25) share their mental health stories in ways that can spark meaningful conversation and bring about real change.

Particularly through sharing and discussing short films about mental health, made by young filmmakers, Changing Minds aims to positively change how we think and talk about mental health issues. For young people especially, mental health challenges can be difficult to navigate – and too many face these challenges alone, fearful of being misunderstood and marginalized. This can change. This should change. With students, educators, and mental health advocates all working together, we can help young people to feel free, safe, healthy, and hopeful.

STIGMA AFFECTS ALL ASPECTS OF WELLNESS

IT'S OFTEN TRUE that we don't talk about mental health enough – and that many of the conversations we do have are inhibited by mistrust, misunderstanding, and a general sense of unease. Even among close friends and family members, mental health stigma can prevent open, nonjudgmental, and empathetic dialogue.

While this state of affairs may be familiar, its far-reaching impact on our lives can be difficult to appreciate fully. Our failure to discuss mental health in constructive ways comes with many costs – and, left unaddressed, these costs only compound over time, with consequences felt at every level of our society.

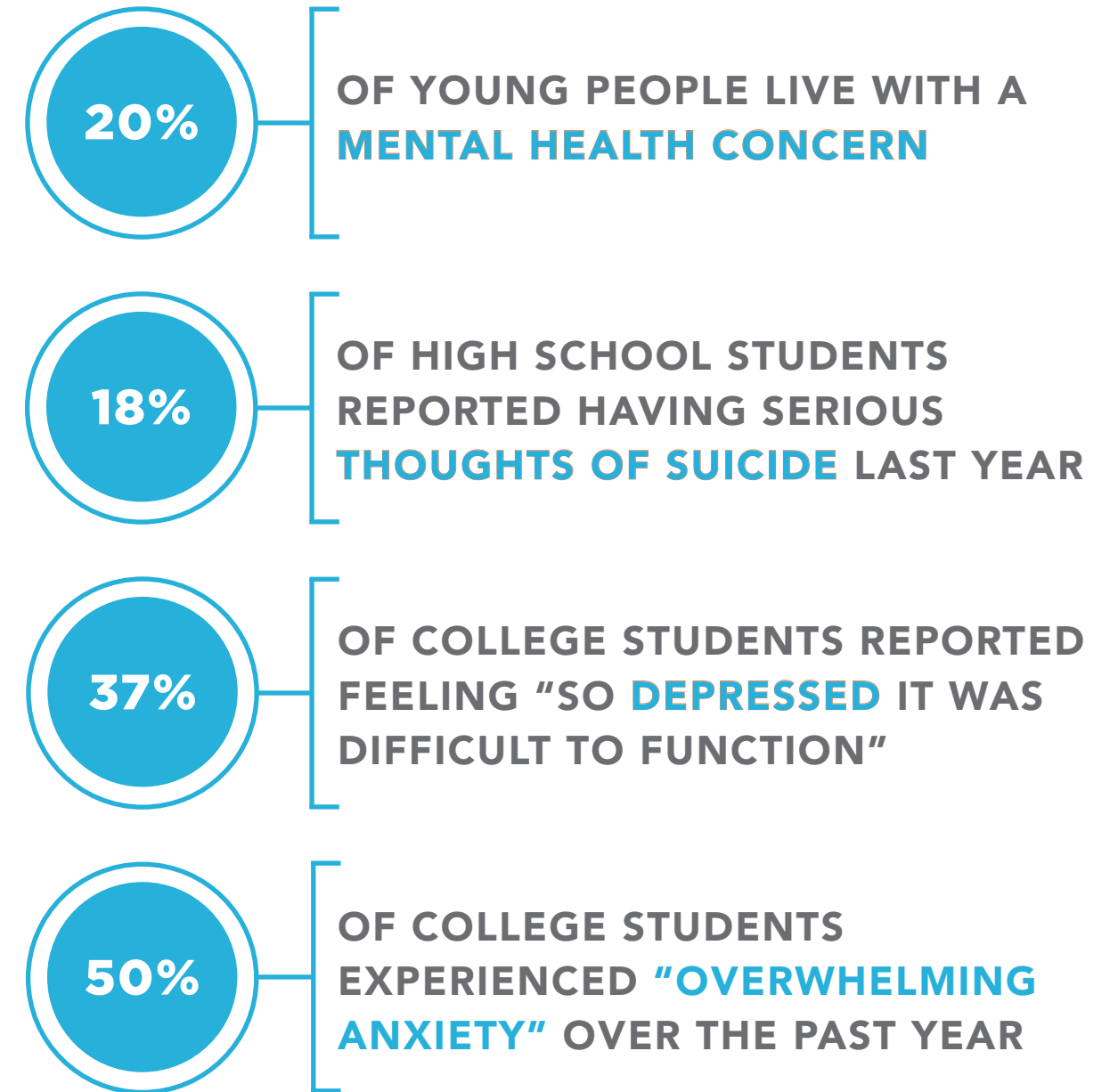
The World Health Organization has defined wellness as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” There are eight dimensions of wellness: emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, and spiritual. Mental health stigma hinders our ability to pursue opportunities across each of these dimensions. For young people – who are still establishing their identities and place in the world – this unnecessary roadblock can be especially damaging.

We can't put mental health in a box and move it aside; mental health *is* health. By helping young people “change minds,” we can change lives for the better.



YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH: IN FOCUS

MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES often begin very early in life. Half of all lifetime cases begin by age 14, and three-quarters by age 24. Too often, there are not enough resources available to help young people and their families get the support they need – and depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, eating disorders, and other mental health struggles remain all too prevalent. Consider the following:



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

IT IS OUR HOPE that viewing these student films about mental health will lead to productive, honest conversations.

From our vantage point, after watching these films, we think some of the following questions may be a good place to start:

- ▶ What are your general reactions to the films?
- ▶ Which film was your favorite? Why?
- ▶ Did any of these films surprise you? How?
- ▶ Did these films make you feel more or less likely to talk about mental health in your own life? How so?
- ▶ Was there anything these films were missing?



In making this film, we felt empowered to talk visually about what it looks and feels like to encounter an eating disorder, and how that impacts one's personal life. We're so excited to share it with a wider audience.

- Abby Thompson

Once everyone has given their general feedback, perhaps then is the time to get into bigger themes. Some possible questions include:

- ▶ Do you feel that there is stigma around mental health concerns? If so, why?
- ▶ What do you think people can do to make others feel safe to share their experiences honestly?
- ▶ What kind of support exists for young people with mental health concerns? What's missing?
- ▶ Do you feel that you have a place to turn when you are having a hard time mentally or emotionally?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

CHANGING MINDS conversations can go in many different directions – hopefully always in ways that are friendly, authentic, and honest. Facilitators can come up with creative activities to discuss mental health, and we also recommend the following exercises:

▶ HAVE YOU EVER HEARD CIRCLE

Everyone stands or sits in a circle. The facilitator says, "Raise your hand if you've ever heard someone say..."

Facilitator can choose statements on their own, or draw from these examples related to mental health stigma:

- Just get over it.
- You don't seem depressed.
- You're being dramatic.
- Everyone gets sad sometimes.
- Other people have it worse.
- Snap out of it.
- Why can't you be normal?
- Nobody wants to hear about your problems.
- That's not a real problem.

After each one, participants can briefly react or discuss: Why would people say this? How might it affect someone? What would be a more supportive statement?

▶ Role Reversal Exercise

- Pair up
- Person A shares a mild stressor (school, work, family)
- Person B listens, then repeats the story back in first person as if it's their own
- Switch roles

▶ "What Helps / What Harms" Wall

- On sticky notes or paper:
 - Write 1 thing people say that helps mental health
 - Write 1 thing people say that could harm mental health
- Put them on two sides of a wall or board
- Review as a group and discuss patterns

▶ Write an Anonymous Note

- Prompt:
 - "Something I've never said out loud is..."
- Collect all responses anonymously
- Mix and redistribute randomly
- Each person reads one aloud

▶ Soundtrack Your Mood

Ask everyone to pick a song that represents:

- How they feel today
- Play 10–20 seconds of each
- After each clip, the person can explain (or pass)

▶ Build a Personal "Emergency Kit"

Have everyone write down:

- 2 people they can reach out to
- 2 things that calm them down
- 1 place they feel safe
- 1 thing they can do in 10 minutes to reset

▶ One Small Action Commitment

- Each person completes this sentence:
 - "This week, I will _____ to take care of my mental health."



ABOUT COMMUNITY ACCESS

FOUNDED IN 1974, Community Access is a pioneer of supportive housing and social services in NYC. A big part of our work involves advocacy – breaking down barriers and rallying our community to promote housing, human rights, and human rights.

Our mission is to expand opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy, and healing-focused services. We are built upon the simple truth that people are experts in their own lives.



I wanted to give a voice to teens trying to figure out their own identities in a world that wants to box them in and label them.

- Daphne Parkhill



MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

NYC SUPPORT

NYC 988

Free, confidential mental health and substance use support for anyone in NYC, available 24/7 by call, text, or chat. NYC 988 can also connect people to local crisis services.

Mobile Crisis Teams

Provide in-person crisis intervention, assessment, de-escalation, and connection to services through NYC 988.

NATIONAL CRISIS HOTLINES

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

24/7 emotional support via call, text, or chat for mental health crises and substance use concerns.

Crisis Text Line

Text **HOME** to **741741** for free, confidential 24/7 support. Spanish support available..

SAMHSA National Helpline

Call **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** for treatment referrals and information. TTY: 1-800-487-4889.

WARM LINES & PEER SUPPORT

NAMI Warmline Directory

Find peer-run support lines for non-crisis emotional support. <https://helplinefaqs.nami.org/article/577-nami-national-warmline-directory>

RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR

Call BlackLine

Peer support and crisis line prioritizing Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Call or text **1-800-604-5841** <https://www.callblackline.com/>

RESOURCES FOR DEAF & HARD OF HEARING

988 for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

Access support via call, text, chat, or ASL videophone. Use relay service or dial 711 then 988. <https://deaflead.org/>

RESOURCES FOR BLIND, LOW VISION & VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Lighthouse Guild

Vision care, rehabilitation, and behavioral health support. <https://lighthouseguild.org/healthcare-services/behavioral-health-services/>

LGBTQ+ AND IDENTITY-SPECIFIC SUPPORT

The Trevor Project

24/7 crisis support for LGBTQ+ youth via phone, text, and chat.

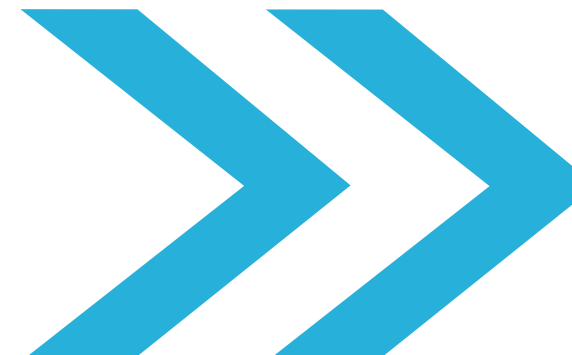
Trans Lifeline

Peer support hotline run by and for trans people. Call or text (877) 565-8860

FINDING ONGOING CARE

FindTreatment.gov

Confidential, anonymous locator for mental health and substance use services. <https://findtreatment.gov>



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ABOUT CHANGING MINDS

Established in 2015 by Community Access, Changing Minds is a festival and stigma-challenging community education program in NYC that sparks real-life conversations about mental health matters.

Join us as we shine a spotlight on youth mental health and celebrate this year's dynamic group of young filmmakers, their stories, and experiences.



Laurie M Tisch
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The Pixley Hill Foundation

