Mental Health Role Plays

Goals:
- To discuss various mental health issues and mental illnesses.
- To discuss stigma, support and treatment options surrounding mental health issues and mental illnesses.

Requirements:
- This activity should coincide with more information on coping and mental health issues/illnesses.
- These role plays should only be done with an established group that feels safe, and comfortable with each other and the facilitator.
- Appendix 1 printed up and cut apart so that each role is separate from its counterpart. (Cut ‘person 1’ and ‘person 2’ apart).
- A quiet space for youth to present and listen to the role plays (as some people are quiet when they present).
- A list of contact places, or numbers available to refer youth. Use any of the Teen Talk Resource sheets, or make a list of school or community specific resources.
- Save time after this activity to debrief individually with any youth who may be affected by the activity.
- Mental health handout for each youth (optional).

Instructions:
- Introduce the topic and mention that mental health issues, mental illnesses and suicide are often hard to talk about; they can make people feel uncomfortable. Explain that no one is expected to be an expert and that this is just a chance to gain some information.
- Gather participants and create a safe space emphasizing ground rules like respect, no put-downs and being non-judgmental before beginning this activity. Mention that youth can take a break if they need it, and that it is OK to ask lots of questions.
- Separate the youth into pairs. One person plays person 1, and the other plays person 2. After reading their card to themselves, ask the youth to sit down and have a discussion with the other person according to what was stated on their card. They do not show each other their card, and each group does their role play for the rest of the group to watch.
- Ask the youth what they thought and use the debrief guide below to talk about each situation once the youth have finished their role play.
- Be aware that some youth may be dealing with mental health issues and suicide, and be available to debrief with youth after this session.
- Make sure you have contact places or numbers displayed or available to refer the youth to.
- At the end of the session give each youth a mental health handout and encourage them to fill out the Passport to Health (see Passport to Health Activity) and keep it on themselves for whenever they are feeling down and need to look at it.
Facilitator’s Copy of Mental Health Scenarios and Role Plays

1. Supporting a Friend

**Person #1**

You just started grade 12. Over the summer, you started to hear voices at the back of your head. You are starting to feel really scared of going to school for the last year. The voices get really bad when you are in classes, and you are starting to think about not being in school at all. Nobody else is hearing the voices and you feel like nobody would believe you if you told them. A friend has noticed you acting differently and asks you what has been going on. You decide to tell them about your fears and the voices.

**Person #2**

Your friend hasn’t been acting like themselves lately. They have been really edgy and irritable when you have seen them at school. You are starting to worry that your friend is going to stop coming to school. You want to be supportive, but last time you talked about it, they seemed really freaked out and wouldn’t tell you anything. Try talking to your friend about how they are feeling and what has been going on. Listen without judging them, and offer to get help with them if they want.

**Debrief:**

It can be very difficult to support a friend who is living with Schizophrenia or any other type of mental illness. Ask the youth what might a supportive friend do? Have the group brainstorm some ideas like listens, doesn’t judge or pressure, is patient, promises not to tell someone else - though it is important to tell and adult you trust if a friend really needs help or if you think your friend is going to hurt themselves, etc. Let them know that sometimes, being there for a person means letting them decide when they are ready to talk or get help. This can be pretty frustrating for the person offering support. If you feel like supporting your friend is difficult for you, you may want to talk to someone about your feelings and what will help you get through it.

2. Getting Help with Your/ Someone Else’s Thoughts of Suicide.

**Person #1**

You are 16 and back in school. You took last semester off after having a really hard time and attempting suicide. You got some good coping skills from group therapy and talking to an older person you trust but lately you have been really feeling down and you are thinking about suicide again. Some people at school have been making fun of you, and other people ignore you or treat you like nothing ever happened. Everyone at school thinks you’re better and assumes everything is fine. This is making you feel even worse. You don’t want to go through the same thing as before so you decide to talk to someone who many people trust at lunch about your feelings and you tell them are having thoughts of suicide.

**Person #2**

You have lots of friends because you listen and support many of your peers at school. Another student who you remember from a last year is back in school. You don’t know why they were gone, but you heard it was because they tried to kill themselves. They come to you at lunch and are looking for someone to talk to. They tell you they are having thoughts of suicide again, and you realize that they need more help than you can give them. Let them know you have to tell someone else (because they are planning to hurt themselves), and offer to do it together with them.
Debrief:
It is really important to talk to someone if you are having thoughts of suicide, especially if you have attempted or thought about suicide before. If someone tells you they are thinking about suicide, it may be necessary to tell an adult that you trust about it. If you are worried that the person will think you “ratted them out”, you can tell them that you need to be sure they are going to be safe. It is a good idea to offer to include the person when you talk to someone else. Ask the youth: “Who are some people you could talk to, to get help in this situation?” You could call a phone line together (MB Suicide Line 1-877-435-7170), go to the guidance office together, talk to someone the person trusts together, etc. Also remember that if someone hurts themselves or kills themselves after talking to you, it is not your fault. Being supportive and doing what you can to help usually gives people some relief when they are thinking of suicide, even if that relief doesn’t last long enough to prevent it.

3. Supporting Others
Person #1
You were diagnosed with an anxiety disorder called OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) when you were 14. You are really scared about germs and getting sick. This is your first year at a big high school, and you are not doing very well. You have been trying to use coping mechanisms your counsellor taught you, but they aren’t always working. You start doing things like opening classroom door handles with your feet, and putting hand sanitizer on after touching desks, pens or pencils. You have had a few panic attacks in the cafeteria already this year. People have started making fun of you, calling you a freak and putting garbage in front of your locker. Some people are teasing you when someone from your homeroom class steps in.

Person #2-4 (could be more than one)
A person at your school has been doing things like opening doors with their feet and using hand sanitizer ALL the time. You saw them in the cafeteria a couple of times totally freaking out and faking a heart attack. You think they are just being dramatic and have tried to teach them a lesson by surrounding their locker with garbage. You are laughing at them with your friends until someone comes and interrupts you.

Person #3
A person from your homeroom class is being made fun of in the hall and you don’t think it is cool. The people are making fun of them for having OCD, (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). They are teasing them for having panic attacks and using hand sanitizer and opening doors with their feet. Step in and let the people who are teasing your classmate that what they are doing is not OK, and ask your classmate if they are ok.

Debrief:
Some people might have a hard time understanding what someone who is dealing with a mental illness might be going through. Stigma is when people are made to feel embarrassed about having a mental health issue. Stigma surrounding mental illness and mental health issues has a number negative effects on people: it can make many people feel like having a mental illness is bad or wrong or weird; it makes it easier for some people to hurt or tease someone with a mental illness; and makes it harder for people dealing with mental illness to get help.
Tell the youth that it is never OK to make fun of someone who is having a hard time or dealing with a mental illness. We can ALL challenge the stereotypes and stigma associated with mental illness, making our schools and communities safer.
Ask the youth “What are some ways we can challenge the negative messages about mental illnesses?” List could include some of the following: standing up for people if they get teased, be there for our friends or peers who are dealing with mental illness, run awareness days, have announcements, participate in activities like Mental Health or Suicide Awareness weeks, don’t spread rumours etc.

4. General Resources and Self Care

Person #1
You have been feeling sad for the last couple of months. The feelings started when your boyfriend/girlfriend broke up with you in the fall, and seem to be getting worse. You have stopped going to school on a regular basis, and recently have stopped eating and sleeping properly. You’ve also really stressed because you’ve fallen so far behind in school you’re about to be kicked out. Although you used to be an outgoing person, you don’t feel like hanging out with friends, and feel sometimes that you’d rather just go to sleep at night and not wake up the next day. Open up to your friend and let them know how you are feeling. You refuse to talk to your parents, a counsellor, or teacher, but ask your friend for help.

Person #2
You are the best friend of Person #1. You’ve noticed them withdraw since their boyfriend/girlfriend broke up with them in the fall, but things seem to be getting worse for them. You know that they are really stressed because they have fallen so far behind in school that they’re about to be kicked out. You’re concerned and worried. You went through depression last year when times were hard for you too. Listen thoughtfully and help your friend think what they can do to deal with their depression. (Things they can do for themselves and some resources or services that your friend might want to take advantage of).

Debrief:
Explain that sometimes people can be dealing with many issues such depression and stress. Mention that someone may feel depressed because of a life event, or something that happens to them (This is called situational depression). Sometimes, that depression does not go away, or a person feels depressed all the time and can’t figure out why (This is called clinical depression). Regardless of the type of depression, that person needs some coping strategies. Discuss options for coping:

1. Talking to someone/counselling/group therapy: formally available in community health centres, through a Teen Clinic, Guidance Counsellors etc. or informally through a trustworthy person;
2. Calling help lines: the Klinic Crisis Line 1-888-322-3019- is a free, anonymous place to talk about feelings;
3. Medication: stress that medication may not be for everyone or all types of depression; many people may choose not to use medication as part of their coping. Everyone has a right to decide (with their doctor) if medication is right for them.
4. Self-Care: it is really important whenever someone is going through a rough time. Discuss/brainstorm with the youth various types of self-care. This list could and should include MANY things, like talking to a supportive friend, family member, community member, spiritual leader etc., doing things that make you feel happy, let you express/reflect on your feelings (going for walks, journaling, art, music) and things that distract you from your problems for a while like sports video games etc.) If youth suggest substances, debrief, it’s a choice some people make but it may lead to problematic consequences, especially in the long run. And that it’s important to have a variety of coping activities.
Roleplay #1:
Person #1
You just started grade 12. Over the summer, you started to hear voices at the back of your head. You are starting to feel really scared of going to school for the last year. The voices get really bad when you are in classes, and you are starting to think about not being in school at all. Nobody else is hearing the voices and you feel like nobody would believe you if you told them. A friend has noticed you acting differently and asks you what has been going on. You decide to tell them about your fears and the voices.

Roleplay #1:
Person #2
Your friend hasn’t been acting like themselves lately. They have been really edgy and irritable when you have seen them at school. You are starting to worry that your friend is going to stop coming to school. You want to be supportive, but last time you talked about it, they seemed really freaked out and wouldn’t tell you anything. Try talking to your friend about how they are feeling and what has been going on. Listen without judging them, and offer to get help with them if they want.
Roleplay #2:  
**Person #1**  
You are 16 and back in school. You took last semester off after having a really hard time and attempting suicide. You got some good coping skills from group therapy and talking to an older person you trust but lately you have been really feeling down and you are thinking about suicide again. Some people at school have been making fun of you, and other people ignore you or treat you like nothing ever happened. Everyone at school thinks you're better and assumes everything is fine.  
This is making you feel even worse. You don't want to go through the same thing as before so you decide to talk to someone who many people trust at lunch about your feelings and you tell them are having thoughts of suicide.

---

Roleplay #2:  
**Person #2**  
You have lots of friends because you listen and support many of your peers at school. Another student who you remember from last year is back in school. You don't know why they were gone, but you heard it was because they tried to kill themselves. They come to you at lunch and are looking for someone to talk to. They tell you they are having thoughts of suicide again, and you realize that they need more help than you can give them. Let them know you have to tell someone else (because they are planning to hurt themselves), and offer to do it together with them.
Roleplay #3:
Person #1

You were diagnosed with an anxiety disorder called OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) when you were 14. You are really scared about germs and getting sick. This is your first year at a big high school, and you are not doing very well. You have been trying to use coping mechanisms your counsellor taught you, but they aren’t always working. You start doing things like opening classroom door handles with your feet, and putting hand sanitizer on after touching desks, pens or pencils. You have had a few panic attacks in the cafeteria already this year. People have started making fun of you, calling you a freak and putting garbage in front of your locker. Some people are teasing you when someone from your homeroom class steps in.

Roleplay #3:
Person #3

A person from your homeroom class is being made fun of in the hall and you don’t think it is cool. The people are making fun of them for having OCD, (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder). They are teasing them for having panic attacks and using hand sanitizer and opening doors with their feet. Step in and let the people who are teasing your classmate that what they are doing is not OK, and ask your classmate if they are OK.
Roleplay #3:
Person #2-4 (could be more than one)
A person at your school has been doing things like opening doors with their feet and using hand sanitizer ALL the time. You saw them in the cafeteria a couple of times totally freaking out and faking a heart attack. You think they are just being dramatic and have tried to teach them a lesson by surrounding their locker with garbage. You are laughing at them with your friends until someone comes and interrupts you.
Roleplay #4:
Person #2
You are the best friend of Person #1. You've noticed them withdraw since their boyfriend/girlfriend broke up with them in the fall, but things seem to be getting worse for them. You know that they are really stressed because they have fallen so far behind in school that they're about to be kicked out. You're concerned and worried. You went through depression last year when times were hard for you too. Listen thoughtfully and help your friend think what they can do to deal with their depression. (Things they can do for themselves and some resources or services that your friend might want to take advantage of).

Roleplay #4:
Person #1:
You have been feeling sad for the last couple of months. The feelings started when your boyfriend/girlfriend broke up with you in the fall, and seem to be getting worse. You have stopped going to school on a regular basis, and recently have stopped eating and sleeping properly. You've also really stressed because you've fallen so far behind in school you're about to be kicked out. Although you used to be an outgoing person, you don’t feel like hanging out with friends, and feel sometimes that you’d rather just go to sleep at night and not wake up the next day. Open up to your friend and let them know how you are feeling. You refuse to talk to your parents, a counsellor, or teacher, but ask your friend for help.