



### TOOLKIT INSTRUCTIONS

By using this toolkit you are about to become an active participant in the prevention of mental illness among youth!

This Prevent Mental Illness toolkit is intended to help educators and community groups working with youth to hold discussions and develop activities that educate the community and school population and involve them in prevention.

#### Toolkit Materials

Each toolkit contains a resource guide, activities, talking points, posters, bookmarks and a video that features youth talking about their personal experiences with mental illness.

##### Resource Guide

The resource guide contains information about EDAPT, myths and facts, the early signs and symptoms of mental illness and how to get help. The notebook format enables educators and community groups to easily distribute this valuable information and allows youth to take notes during discussions, events or class.

##### Activities and Talking Points

The activities and talking points give teachers and other educators suggestions for classroom or community projects. Discussion topics are available that coincide with the specific subjects being taught in the various classes or group meetings and address components of mental illness and prevention.

##### Posters

Each toolkit contains two Prevent Mental Illness posters. The poster features the early signs and symptoms of mental illness and how to get help. You should place these posters in an area where students are most likely to see them.

##### Bookmarks

Every toolkit includes 200 bookmarks that contain the early signs and symptoms of mental illness and how to get help. You should make these bookmarks easily accessible for students and teachers. For additional bookmarks, please contact EDAPT.

##### Video

A 30-minute video that shows youth talking about their personal experiences with mental illness. This video will provide opportunities to talk about specific signs and symptoms.

#### Awareness Activities

##### Pre-Awareness Preparation

When you receive your toolkit, hold a teacher/staff planning meeting. Using the website, [www.preventmentalillness.org](http://www.preventmentalillness.org), download additional copies of the materials that will help you plan awareness activities and events. For instance, giving your teachers a copy of the activities and talking points will help them to pre-plan a discussion or project in their classroom. Distributing the myths and facts and early signs and symptoms of mental illness will not only help educate school personnel on the positive benefits of early detection and intervention of mental illness, but should also encourage their support and participation in ongoing educational activities. If possible, bring in a EDAPT representative to assist in initially educating the school staff about the issue, the myths and facts and early signs and symptoms of mental illness and acceptable prevention strategies about which you feel the staff should be aware.

Additional curriculum is available through the National Institute of Health.

Website: <http://science-education.nih.gov/customers.nsf/MSMental> or  
<http://science-education.nih.gov/supplements>

*continued on back*



### TOOLKIT INSTRUCTIONS

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Prepare your school counselors and social workers for the likelihood that a student may come to them for guidance and assistance during (and after) classroom discussions on mental illness – as increasing awareness may cause a student to realize they need help. If your school counselors or social workers aren't trained to respond to mental illness, you might want to ask for assistance from a qualified counselor or mental health professional in the community. If a young person's story suggests the onset of a psychotic illness, call EDAPT.

#### **Day One**

Show the toolkit's 30-minute video to school personnel and the student body. The video shows youth talking about their actual experiences with mental illness: what they witnessed or heard, what happened to them, what happened to their friends or siblings, how it influenced them and what advice they would give to others in their situation. The video will educate those in attendance on the reality of mental illness – creating the energy necessary to develop effective prevention strategies.

Using the website, [www.preventmentalillness.org](http://www.preventmentalillness.org), download and printout PDF files of myths and facts and what is mental illness handouts. Hand out these materials along with the bookmarks, which includes early signs and symptoms of mental illness.

#### **Day Two**

Utilizing the activities and talking points suggestions, every classroom teacher should dedicate at least one class to discussions or projects that address mental illness. For instance, one of the classroom projects suggests the teacher assists students in creating an anonymous student body survey with questions concerning students' beliefs about mental illness; then help the class compile the data to determine the likelihood that a student in their school is at risk for a mental illness. Finally, submit the findings to the school newspaper. Another suggestion is to have students disseminate materials (PIER will provide extra materials upon request) to individuals, businesses and organizations in your community, as well as to other students and school personnel who were not part of the classroom or staff meeting discussions. Examples of organizations include the school's PTA leadership, police departments, pediatricians/doctors/psychologists offices, clergy, youth group leaders and military recruiters. In that way, youth come to know the members of their community who hold a stake in helping to prevent mental illness, and the community members have an opportunity to meet their community's youth and better understand the issues of concern to them.

#### **Ongoing Prevention Efforts**

Your participation in mental illness awareness will ensure that your school staff, student population, community members, organizations and community leaders become aware of the benefits of early detection and intervention of mental illness. But it is up to all of us to ensure ongoing prevention efforts in our communities and schools. We hope you will utilize the 'awareness' education you've received and form collaborative community efforts dedicated to maintaining the Prevent Mental Illness messages and lessons. Please help Maine youth now so that they can grow into healthy, happy adults by creating effective prevention strategies and policies in your school, community and state!



### ACTIVITIES



Interesting, engaging and effective classroom activities to educate students about the benefits of early detection and intervention of mental illness.

#### General

- Assign teams of students to research local or state facts and statistics about mental illness. They should also research and provide information on preventive or intervention services. Applying their findings, allow them to develop informational flyers, web pages, newsletters, public service announcements and/or commercials to promote awareness and prevention. Make sure the students' work is posted or distributed within the school and/or community.
- Have your students hang the Prevent Mental Illness posters in a visible area of the school, such as the student common area or the hallway near the main entrance.
- Assist your students in planning a dance for mental illness awareness. Select music that promotes understanding and respect, helping to fight the stigma facing the 1 in 5 youth with mental health problems.
- Plan a school-wide or community 'walk' with your students to honor those who have suffered or lost their lives or loved ones to mental illness or related causes (e.g. suicide). Students can use the walk to raise awareness.
- Help students to develop an anonymous school survey that will measure their peers' attitudes concerning mental illness. After administering the survey, compile the results and calculate the probability that a student in the school is at risk for mental illness. Present the findings to your school administration, school board or parent group.
- Discuss the role of citizens as activists and agents of change, particularly in the area of youth advocacy and mental illness prevention. As a class, identify an opportunity to influence change, such as volunteering or participating in a local event to show support for mental illness prevention.
- Research relevant laws in California and in other states. Write a letter to your senator expressing support for a specific issue related to the law and mental illness prevention.
- Have students review existing school policies concerning mental illness. Discuss whether additional policies are needed to help students who display early signs and symptoms. They may wish to put their thoughts into writing in the form of a proposal to the school administrator or school board.

#### Art

- Invite students to create imaginative art that represents one or more of the symptoms of mental illness or the importance of getting help early. Place them in a school location where they can be seen by other students and school personnel. Have the artists write a description to display with their artwork.
- Conduct a "Prevent Mental Illness" door-decorating contest. Divide the class into pairs or groups and assign each group a door in the school. To encourage student body awareness and participation, the student body can vote on their favorite door.
- Make a collage with pictures and words to illustrate the messages teens hear and see about mental illness in the media, music, from parents and peers to illustrate positive and negative views of mental illness.

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### ACTIVITIES

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#### **Literature**

- Encourage students to use mental illness prevention as a topic for local, state and national speech or essay competitions.
- Challenge your students to write an article or story about the positive benefits of early detection and intervention of mental illness for the school or community newspaper. Have the work judged by a panel of local journalists. Ask that the winning article be highlighted during the Mental Illness Awareness Week (October) or immediately after.
- Invite students to interview one or more older relatives or neighbors about mental illness beliefs in the past. They might tape-record the interview (with permission) and write a report about what they learned.
- Bring a representative from EDAPT into the classroom to talk about mental illness and discuss services specific to youth and their families. Your students could submit a short story and a list of services to the school or local newspaper.
- Ask your class to watch a TV program or movie (such as A Beautiful Mind) about a person suffering from mental illness. During the next class, have the students give a short description of the illness, the signs and symptoms displayed and how the people helped the individual get help. Then have the class discuss the influence TV and movies might have on their own ideas about mental illness.
- Assign students to research the historical timeline and social views of mental illness. Direct them to look at what occurred during those transitions. They should include information on legal statutes and close with their summary of the findings, including their own opinion. Have students present their papers and discuss their findings and opinions.

#### **Drama or Theater**

- Encourage students to use mental illness prevention as a topic for local, state and national drama competitions.
- Assist students to enact or role-play a mock mental illness incident, demonstrating the signs and symptoms, myths and facts and how to get help. Include the roles that friends, family members, teachers, bystanders and others may play in these situations. Include community groups in the enactment as appropriate. Follow-up with a discussion about what occurred. Discuss the obligation of all those involved, as well as school safety issues and strategies.
- Invite your students to create a dramatic scene in which they confront a friend who is showing early signs of mental illness. Bring in a EDAPT representative to discuss different approaches for helping a friend in need.

#### **Computer or Interactive**

- Depending on skill level and software availability, have students develop an interactive game, quiz, video documentary, etc. dealing with mental illness awareness. (This can be done in anything from custom-animated PowerPoint to basic programming or authoring tools.) Consider setting the finished product up in the cafeteria as a kiosk and encourage students to “test” themselves to see how much they know about the topic.
- Have your students incorporate their skills into producing something to raise awareness about mental illness. Depending on their skill level, students could create materials that could be aired in the school television broadcast system or a web page that could be featured on the school’s website.



### TALKING POINTS



Young people are naturally curious and have questions about mental illnesses. Understanding mental illnesses can be challenging for anyone. Myths, confusion, fear and misinformation about these illnesses cause anxiety, create stereotypes and reinforce stigma. During the past 50 years, great advances have been made in the areas of diagnosis and treatment of mental illnesses. Educators and community group leaders can help young people understand that these are brain-related conditions, like any other disease of the body, and that they can be treated.

In order to talk about mental illnesses, you must be knowledgeable and reasonably comfortable with the subject. This toolkit and the Prevent Mental Illness website ([www.preventmentalillness.org](http://www.preventmentalillness.org)) is intended to provide educators, community group leaders, parents and others with a basic understanding and answers to the following questions: What are mental illnesses? Who gets them? What causes them? What are early signs? How are diagnoses made? What treatments are available?

When explaining how mental illnesses affect a person, it is helpful to make a comparison to a physical illness. For example, many people get sick with a cold or the flu, but only a few get really sick with something serious like pneumonia. People who have a cold are usually able to do their normal activities; however, if they get pneumonia, they will have to take medicine and may have to go to the hospital. Similarly, feelings of sadness, anxiety, worry, irritability or sleep problems are common for most people; however, when these feelings get very intense, last for a long period of time, gets progressively worse and begin to interfere with school, work and relationships, it may be a sign of a mental illness. Discuss how early screening and intervention have saved lives of cancer patients who might have died in an earlier era.

**You should be aware of youths' needs, concerns, knowledge and experience with mental illnesses. When talking about mental illnesses, you should:**

- communicate in a simple, straightforward manner
- communicate at a level that is appropriate to the age group and developmental level
- have the discussion when youth feel safe and comfortable
- listen and watch for reactions during the discussion
- slow down or back up if any one becomes confused or looks upset
- be aware of students whose questions, comments or nonverbal behavior may indicate they need to talk further with you or someone else

Considering these points will help any young person to be more relaxed and understand more of the conversation.

Middle school-aged youth typically ask more questions, especially about friends or family with emotional or behavioral problems. Their concerns and questions are usually very straightforward. "Why is that person talking to herself?" They may worry about their safety or the safety of their family and friends. It is important to answer their questions directly and honestly and to reassure them about their concerns and feelings.

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## EDUCATORS & COMMUNITY

### TALKING POINTS

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Teenagers are generally capable of handling difficult topics and asking for more specific information. Teenagers often talk more openly with their friends and peers than with their parents. As a result, some teens may have already received misinformation about mental illnesses. Teenagers respond more positively to an open dialogue that includes give and take. As many educators have learned, they are not as open or responsive when a conversation feels one-sided or like a lecture.

Talking to children about mental illnesses can be an opportunity for adults to provide them with information, support and guidance. Learning about mental illnesses can lead to improved recognition, earlier treatment, greater understanding and compassion, as well as decreased stigma.

For specific information about psychosis and treatment, please visit the resources included on [www.preventmentalillness.org](http://www.preventmentalillness.org).