Calling all youth artists! “My Feelings Matter” Poster Contest
by Katie Myhre | Feb 18, 2016 | Children’s Mental Health Awareness Month
https://wisconsinknowschildrensmentalhealthmatters.wordpress.com

First Place: Sarah, Algoma High School, WI
Second Place:
Jessica, Kimberly High School, WI

MY FEELINGS MATTER

RESPECT PEOPLE’S FEELINGS. EVEN IF IT DOESN’T MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU, IT COULD MEAN EVERYTHING TO THEM.
The first week in May is Children’s Mental Health Awareness week, and among the many community activities to participate in is the “My Feelings Matter” poster contest for any youth, age preschool-12th grade to participate in. Poster submissions are due by **March 17th, 2017** and original posters must be mailed to:

Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health
133 South Butler St., Suite 340
Madison, WI 53703

For full details on poster requirements, submission instructions, and important contact information, use this form: My Feelings Matter Entry Form 2017

The winning posters will be displayed during Children’s Mental Health Awareness Week in May. We are looking forward to seeing all of the inspiring posters!
9 Ways to Fight Mental Health Stigma

By Laura Greenstein | Oct. 26, 2015

Stigma is one of the most challenging aspects of living with a mental health condition. It causes people to feel ashamed for something that is out of their control and prevents many from seeking the help they need and speaking out. In order to address this problem, we asked our Facebook community, “What is the best way to end stigma?” Here are some of the responses we received:

1. **Talk openly about mental health.** “Mental illness touches so many lives and yet it's STILL a giant secret. Be brave and share your story.” –Lindsey Watkin Lason
2. **Educate yourself and others about mental health.** “Challenge people respectfully when they are perpetrating stereotypes and misconceptions. Speak up and educate them.” –Yvonne Lucas
3. **Be conscious of your language.** “Saying someone is "retarded" or using (or even mentioning) the "N" word is politically incorrect, but it's still fine to throw around words like crazy, psycho, lunatic, etc.” –Michele Croston
4. **Encourage equality in how people perceive physical illness and mental illness.** “We should explain mental illness as similar to any other illness. When someone acts differently or "strange" during diabetic shock we don't blame them for moral failings.” –William Newbill
5. **Show empathy and compassion for those living with a mental health condition.** “Love, we can all use more education, but that will not make people change their opinions. When you love and respect people, love and respect all of them. You have a desire to learn more about who they are and what their life is like.” –Megan Wright Bowman
6. **Stop the criminalization of those who live with mental illness.** “Professionals and families together need to talk to neighborhood groups, law enforcement, hospitals and legal experts to share experiences and knowledge on interacting with mentally ill.” –Valerie E. Johnson
7. **Push back against the way people who live with mental illness are portrayed in the media:** “Push back hard against the media and politicians and pundits that simply deflect real social issues such as gun control to the realm of "psychos" causing mass shootings.” – Michele Croston

8. **See the person, not the illness:** “Talk about your family and friends with mental illnesses any time a conversation invites the opportunity; with an open heart, love, and real information about the real human being that they are; they are not their condition.” – Sheryl Schaffner

9. **Advocate for mental health reform.** “It's empowering people whenever and wherever you can. It's also writing legislators. It's also talking in front of a board of commissioners to advocate for continued mental health funding... It's doing the right thing and treating others justly.” – Danielle Hoover

Stigma is not something that will go away on its own, but if we work together as a community, we can change the way we perceive mental illness in our society. Do your part by pledging to be stigmafree today.

- See more at:
In June of 2014, WISE convened a group of organizational partners, artists, and other community stakeholders to discuss art, mental health stigma, and how we see the arts playing a role in stigma reduction. The learning from that and several subsequent discussions has informed our approach to stigma reduction work in the arts, both in terms of best practices, and cultural relevancy to the arts community.

**WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE? WHAT IS THE CHANGE YOU’D LIKE TO SEE?**

First, ask yourself, what is your purpose in using the arts for stigma reduction? Is it simply to raise awareness? To give a platform to artists who have experienced mental illness? Or are you really focused on a specific change you’d like to see? If your goal, or one of your goals in putting on the event is to reduce stigma, there are some things you may want to think about.
We invite you to consider the following learning outcomes from our discussions about using arts for stigma reduction, as well as from the practical experience of WISE and its partner organizations in putting on stigma-reducing arts events.

1. Personal Story and contact is the main thing we know to reduce stigma. But story can be utilized in a variety of ways.
2. We don’t want to limit creative expression, or try to narrowly define what ‘stigma reducing art’ looks like. If 10 people are looking at the same piece of art, they may all interpret it differently.
3. Art in itself is a form of therapy for people. The story may be about that.
4. Some art may express darkness, and may have allowed a catharsis of sorts for the artist. Perhaps the experience of creating the art was part of a recovery process—if there is a story with it, then the story about its creation may perhaps have the opportunity to illuminate recovery.
5. Ultimately, we want to leave it up to the artists to decide for themselves. Do they want to share a story of recovery? Or do they want to let the work stand on its own?
6. When thinking of aesthetics in the art world, there is no “right” or “wrong” way of expression.
7. Creating the art is often healing, but the experience of consuming it may be different.
8. Recovery is not linear. Art may show that.

PUTTING ON EVENTS

First, do some research about groups that may already be doing this kind of work in your community. Work together! Make connections, and find out who might be able to help you get necessary resources, such as easels for display. If a gallery or venue normally charges a fee to rent, and you cannot afford it, let them know your cause. They may be willing to work with you. Ask other people who have done work like this what their calls for submissions have looked like. You may be able to get a template. Other things that will be important to consider are liability issues. You’ll want artists to sign a waiver form that you have permission to use their artwork and display their story, and keep this on file.

Consider bringing many different people and organizations together to work on things together. Not only will you reach more people, but you will make things much easier on yourself. Plan ahead, and send out press releases. You want to share these stories of recovery with as many people as possible!
Breathe Easy with NAMI AIR

What is NAMI AIR?

NAMI AIR (Anonymous. Inspiring. Relatable) is the new NAMI app, a free, mobile-based social network designed for individuals living with mental health conditions and their family members/caregivers.

NAMI AIR is intended to provide another way for people to find and give support, to connect with others through smart phone and computer tablet.

- NAMI AIR encourages users to anonymously share their stories and receive feedback in the form of social interactions such as “like,” “hug” and “me too.”
- Also allows users to access information on how to get help, learn more about NAMI and connect with the NAMI HelpLine.
- *NAMI AIR* facilitates personal connections with others who may be going through, or have been through, similar situations. Users are anonymous but not alone.

**How do I start using NAMI AIR?**

After NAMI AIR is downloaded through the Apple and Android App Stores, users will start by creating an account and selecting a group to join.

- Individual living with a mental health condition
- Family member or caregiver

What posts you see are determined by the path you chose (for example, If you are a caregiver or family member, the stories you see on your feed will also be from caregivers or family members). You can “toggle” between these two groups—so you can choose to engage in one group, then select the other, allowing you to interact in both communities. However, you will not be able to interact in both at the same time.

**How do users know that my information is safe and confidential?**

Users don’t create any sort of username while signing up. All posts are completely anonymous. The only information you give is your email address. Email addresses are only used for sign in and in case of an emergency. So you can be assured that your posts and participation are completely anonymous.

- See more at: [nami.org/Find-Support/Breathe-Easy-with-NAMI-AIR](http://nami.org/Find-Support/Breathe-Easy-with-NAMI-AIR)
Club Activity: Care Packages

1. Create care packages to give to peers that need a little extra support and care.

2. Contact local psychiatric hospital units to find out if you can create care packages for new patients. (Be sure you check ahead of time what may or may not be allowed.)

3. Provide care packages leading up to and during finals week (or any other stressful time period in your school.)

4. Put together care packages for teachers for stressful time periods (the first 2 weeks of school, right before winter and spring breaks, the last month of school.)

Your care packages can include many different items that promote good mental health, such as adult coloring pages, chocolate, gum, notes of encouragement, etc. Anything your group can think of that would be comforting to receive.
Teaching Youth: Self-Care While Helping a Friend

After viewing the Lifeguard Workshop video and completing the Empathy Building Activities, your students may still have questions about how to support their friends.

Remind them:

1. Even if you do your best to support a friend, you can’t control the choices they make. You are never alone or responsible for anyone who chooses to take their own life.

2. Your feelings are important too. These topics can be difficult and scary to talk about. It is a great idea for you to reach out for support from a trusted adult or counselor or The Trevor Project while helping a friend.

3. Practicing self-care is important for everyone. You may have a lot on your plate from school work to relationships. Make sure to check in with your own physical, emotional, and mental health on a regular basis. It’s okay to let the people you care about know when you are feeling overwhelmed and need support or a break.

4. You don’t have to help someone all by yourself. Remember, you are empowering a friend to connect to resources and a trusted adult. If you are worried for your friend’s life, it is okay to call 911.

Continue the Discussion:

Read the following scenarios to your class.

Scenario 1

Alex and Riley are best friends. Last year, Riley helped Alex go through a difficult time with balancing classwork and sports. Riley listened and accepted Alex’s feelings of being overwhelmed and worried about failing.
Now, Riley is going through a difficult break-up. Riley is heartbroken and wants to know what went wrong. Alex told Riley to text anytime day or night. Riley has started texting Alex at two in the morning to talk several times a week. Alex is tired in class and at practice. Alex even failed a quiz. Some mornings, Alex even feels upset when Riley texts.

Questions:
- What can Alex do?
- How might Riley respond to those actions?
- Do you know what a boundary is? Do you have friends who have told you about their boundaries?

Scenario 2

Shawn and Dylan work on the school newspaper together. Shawn wants to talk to Dylan about something very important at lunch. Shawn seems nervous and Dylan suggest they meet up in a quiet place where they won't be overheard. Dylan also makes sure to mention that they can talk about anything.

At lunch, Shawn comes out to Dylan as being asexual. Shawn is worried about being misunderstood and treated differently if people knew. Dylan is not sure what asexuality means and is afraid of saying the wrong thing. So, Dylan thanks Shawn for trusting their friendship. Dylan also talks about wanting to learn more about the asexual spectrum and identity.

Shawn sends Dylan some links to videos and websites about asexuality and being an ally. Dylan watches some of those videos that day and calls Shawn that evening. Dylan and Shawn decide together to join their school’s Gay Straight Alliance.

Shawn is a great artist so Dylan suggests that they create a comic together for their GSA about asexual identity. Some days Shawn still feels upset and stressed out about other people’s comments and misguided assumptions. Dylan makes time to listen to Shawn’s feelings. Shawn also asks about how Dylan is doing and listens to Dylan’s feelings. Some days, they talk about the paper, school work, and their favorite graphic novels.

Questions:
- What did Dylan do well? How do you think that made Shawn feel?
- Sometimes learning more about what a friend is going through can help expand our horizons and help us grow as a person. How does feeling uncomfortable because you are in a new situation different from feeling uncomfortable because you don’t have time for your physical, mental, or emotional health?
What resources are available at our school to help us support ourselves and our friends?

Journal Questions:

Brainstorm some boundaries that might work well for you. For example, maybe you let your friends know that you turn your phone off at 10PM and check your messages at 6AM the next morning but if they need help before then they can call The Trevor Project or check out other resources you’ve found. They can also explore The Trevor Support Center for lots of links on everything from healthy relationships to bullying to self-harm.

Write about how you might be able to let the people in your life know about your boundaries and why they are important to your wellbeing.
2016 NAMI Wisconsin’s 10th Annual Healing Art Show

Please join us for the opening reception of the HEALING ART SHOW, an exhibit featuring 40 artists from around Wisconsin who creatively express themselves through art. The opening reception will be part of Madison’s Fall Gallery Night, presented by the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art.

Stop by anytime, there will be food and beverages, small art workshops and a chance to meet the artists. There will be fun for all ages, so bring the whole family!

EXHIBITION
OCTOBER 3–NOVEMBER 30

OPENING RECEPTION
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7
5:00–9:00 PM

HOSTED BY:
VSA WISCONSIN
1709 ABERG AVE, SUITE 1
MADISON, WI 53704
Healing Art Show

NAMI Wisconsin is proud to present the 10th Annual Healing Art Show, hosted by VSA Wisconsin. This year’s show features the works of 35 artists from around Wisconsin who have experienced mental illness and creatively express themselves through art.

THE ROLE OF ART
Many people living with mental illness use art as a creative outlet to express and understand their emotions, perceptions and behaviors. Art can be a powerful therapeutic tool that fosters insight and clarity and promotes healing and empowerment.

PURPOSE OF THE HEALING ART SHOW
Through the Healing Art Show, NAMI Wisconsin encourages people living with mental illness to use art as a healing process, and also strives to break down stigma surrounding mental illness. By showcasing artistic works created by people with mental illness, we want to highlight creative talents and strengths that far overshadow any illness.

ABOUT NAMI WISCONSIN
The mission of NAMI Wisconsin is to improve the quality of life of people affected by mental illness and to promote recovery. NAMI Wisconsin accomplishes its mission through individual and legislative advocacy, community education and peer support.
Art therapy is a form of therapy that encourages creativity and self-expression as vehicles to reduce stress, improve self-esteem, increase awareness and help remedy trauma. While many other forms of therapy depend on verbal language to express feelings and overcome personal obstacles, art therapy allows for other, more abstract forms of communication. This tactic makes room for elements of the subconscious that perhaps are not yet ready or able to be verbalized come to the surface.

You do not have to be an artist to enjoy the benefits of art therapy. In fact, most of the exercises rely not on the final product you create but on the therapeutic, meditative ritual of the creative process. If you’re intrigued by the process of relaxation through artistic imagination, we’ve compiled a starter kit to get you on your way.

The following 10 suggestions are simple ways to explore your inner creative voice while turning off the negative influences that so often get in the way. They may not all work for you, but hopefully one or more of the following techniques will serve as the artistic equivalent of a long, hot bath.
1. Design a postcard you don’t intend to send

Whether it’s a love note to someone you’re not ready to confess your feelings to, or an angry rant you know is better left unsaid, sometimes enumerating all the details helps deflate the issue at hand. While writing the text can be therapeutic in its own right, designing the postcard gives even more value to the object. It also allows you to activate different portions of your brain while relaxing in a manner similar to coloring in a coloring book. Once you toss that signed and sealed letter in the trash (or tuck it away in a drawer), you’ll find its message has lost some of its power.
2. Cut and paste a painting to create a collage

Create a painting on a material like paper or cardboard. When you're finished, cut or tear it up. Then use the pieces as building blocks for a new artwork — a collage. See how your original artwork transforms into something new and exciting, something unpredictable. This exercise illuminates the close proximity between creation and destruction, encouraging us to take risks to push ourselves creatively and in other aspects of life.
3. Build an altar to a loved one

Take inspiration from folk art and create an altar honoring a unique relationship between you and another person, living or not. Decorate the shrine with photographs, letters and relics of memorable times spent together, as well as new art objects you’ve created in their honor. Anything can become artistic material, from gifts you’ve exchanged to a candy wrapper you know your subject would love. Building a totem to another person awakens
memories and creates a physical manifestation of a relationship that can provide comfort in tough times.

4. Draw in total darkness

So much of the stress we experience when making art comes from the judgments and criticism that seem unavoidable every step of the way. Try creating artwork in total darkness to make art free from that inner art critic inside your head. (Think of it as a form of blind contour drawing.) You're suddenly freed up to create lines, shapes and patterns simply because you feel like you should. When you turn back on the lights, we suspect you'll be surprised by what you find.
5. Watercolor your bodily state

Lie down and close your eyes. Visualize your body as you breathe in and out. Try to imagine your breath as a particular color as it enters your body, another color as it exits. What do you see? Draw an outline of a body on a large sheet of paper, and inside, create a watercolor based on your bodily state. Think about what these colors mean to you, where they are densest, where they are most opaque. Think of this as the most relaxing self-portrait you’ll ever create.
6. Create a Zentangle-inspired creation

Zentangle is a drawing method invented by Rick Roberts and Maria Thomas, designed to make drawing meditative and accessible to all. To learn the official method you must be taught by a Zentangle Teacher, but you can recreate the basic idea on your own. Use a piece of paper, cut into a 3.5” square piece, and draw a freehand border around the edge in light pencil. Then use your pencil to draw a curved line or squiggle within the border, called a “string.”

Now switch to a pen and begin drawing a “tangle,” a series of patterns and shapes around your “string” and voila! You got yourself a Zentangle. The process is designed to encourage deliberate, ritual creation and allow room for human error — no erasing, that’s against the rules. Traditional Zentangles are always black and white but we fully support experimenting with color. The entire process shouldn’t take more than 15 minutes, and can be repeated.
whenever you feel the urge. Keep some 3.5” squares handy so you can always create when inspiration strikes.

7. Produce a permission slip

Think of the societal and self-imposed pressures you feel on a day-to-day basis, the personal traits you see as faults, the natural slips you see as errors. Choose one of these things and give yourself, in ornamental detail, permission to do just that. Turning one simple defeat into an accomplishment can minimize feelings of self-hatred, allowing you to achieve more of your important goals. Remember, it’s an art project, so make it pretty.
8. ‘Write’ a found poem

Don’t consider yourself a poet? Let someone else do the hard part of coming up with the words by grabbing your material from old books, magazines, newspapers or even letters. Cut out words that jump out at or inspire you. Collage your found materials just as you would a visual collage. You can have a topic or story in mind at the beginning, or just get started and see where your word collaging takes you.
9. Craft a mark-making tool unique to you

Instead of spending the majority of your time on an actual painting, why not focus a little of that attention on crafting an alternative paint brush all your own? You can make a mark-making tool out of nearly anything, whether it’s a row of toothpicks (glued to a cardboard base) and dipped in paint, or a DIY paintbrush made from pom-poms and yarn. When you finally get around to actually making a piece with your new tool, you will have relinquished some of your artistic control to your distinct artistic medium, which, of course, is a work of art in itself.
10. Make a forgiveness box

If there is a certain person — including yourself — you don’t want to harbor negative emotions toward any longer, try making him or her a forgiveness box. Decorate a small box with soothing images and words that can be either specific to an individual or catered to your desired inner state. You can write the person’s name on a slip of paper and include it in the box if preferred, and the name can be removed and exchanged if needed. The act of making the box will bring up happy memories of whomever the box is for, as well as help you physically work toward a place of forgiveness.
Improving Emotional Health
Strategies and Tips for Good Mental Health

People who are emotionally healthy are in control of their emotions and their behavior. They are able to handle life’s challenges, build strong relationships, and recover from setbacks. But just as it requires effort to build or maintain physical health, so it is with mental and emotional health. Improving your emotional health can be a rewarding experience, benefiting all aspects of your life, including boosting your mood, building resilience, and adding to your overall enjoyment of life.

What is mental health or emotional health?

Mental or emotional health refers to your overall psychological well-being. It includes the way you feel about yourself, the quality of your relationships, and your ability to manage your feelings and deal with difficulties. Good mental health isn't just the absence of mental health problems. Being mentally or emotionally healthy is much more than being free of depression, anxiety, or other psychological issues. Rather than the absence of mental illness, mental and emotional health refers to the presence of positive characteristics. Similarly, not feeling bad is not the same as feeling good. While some people may not have negative feelings, they still need to do things that make them feel positive in order to achieve mental and emotional health.

People who are mentally and emotionally healthy have:

- A sense of contentment
- A zest for living and the ability to laugh and have fun
- The ability to deal with stress and bounce back from adversity
- A sense of meaning and purpose, in both their activities and their relationships
- The flexibility to learn new things and adapt to change
- A balance between work and play, rest and activity, etc.
- The ability to build and maintain fulfilling relationships
- Self-confidence and high self-esteem

These positive characteristics of mental and emotional health allow you to participate in life to the fullest extent possible through productive, meaningful activities and strong relationships. These positive characteristics also help you cope when faced with life's challenges and stresses.
The role of resilience in mental and emotional health

Being emotionally and mentally healthy doesn’t mean never going through bad times or experiencing emotional problems. We all go through disappointments, loss, and change. And while these are normal parts of life, they can still cause sadness, anxiety, and stress. The difference is that people with good emotional health have an ability to bounce back from adversity, trauma, and stress. This ability is called resilience. People who are emotionally and mentally healthy have the tools for coping with difficult situations and maintaining a positive outlook. They remain focused, flexible, and creative in bad times as well as good. One of the key factors in resilience is the ability to balance stress and your emotions. The capacity to recognize your emotions and express them appropriately helps you avoid getting stuck in depression, anxiety, or other negative mood states. Another key factor is having a strong support network. Having trusted people you can turn to for encouragement and support will boost your resilience in tough times.

Physical health is connected to mental and emotional health

Taking care of your body is a powerful first step towards mental and emotional health. The mind and the body are linked. When you improve your physical health, you’ll automatically experience greater mental and emotional well-being. For example, exercise not only strengthens our heart and lungs, but also releases endorphins, powerful chemicals that energize us and lift our mood.

The activities you engage in, and the daily choices you make, affect the way you feel physically and emotionally.

- **Get enough rest.** To have good mental and emotional health, it’s important to take care of your body. That includes getting enough sleep. Most people need seven to eight hours of sleep each night in order to function optimally.
- **Learn about good nutrition and practice it.** The subject of nutrition is complicated and not always easy to put into practice. But the more you learn about what you eat and how it affects your energy and mood, the better you can feel.
- **Exercise to relieve stress and lift your mood.** Exercise is a powerful antidote to stress, anxiety, and depression. Look for small ways to add activity to your day, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator or going on a short walk. To get the most mental health benefits, aim for 30 minutes or more of exercise per day.
- **Get a dose of sunlight every day.** Sunlight lifts your mood, so try to get at least 10 to 15 minutes of sun per day. This can be done while exercising, gardening, or socializing.
● **Limit alcohol and avoid cigarettes and other drugs.** These are stimulants that may unnaturally make you feel good in the short term, but have long-term negative consequences for mood and emotional health.

**Improve mental and emotional health by taking care of yourself**

In order to maintain and strengthen your mental and emotional health, it’s important to pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Don’t let stress and negative emotions build up. Try to maintain a balance between your daily responsibilities and the things you enjoy. If you take care of yourself, you’ll be better prepared to deal with challenges if, and when, they arise.

Taking care of yourself includes pursuing activities that naturally release endorphins and contribute to feeling good. In addition to physical exercise, endorphins are also naturally released when we:

- **Do things that positively impact others.** Being useful to others and being valued for what you do can help build self-esteem.
- **Practice self-discipline.** Self-control naturally leads to a sense of hopefulness and can help you overcome despair, helplessness, and other negative thoughts.
- **Learn or discover new things.** Think of it as “intellectual candy.” Try taking an adult education class, join a book club, visit a museum, learn a new language, or simply travel somewhere new.
- **Enjoy the beauty of nature or art.** Studies show that simply walking through a garden can lower blood pressure and reduce stress. The same goes for strolling through a park or an art gallery, hiking, admiring architecture, or sitting on a beach.
- **Manage your stress levels.** Stress takes a heavy toll on mental and emotional health, so it’s important to keep it under control. While not all stressors can be avoided, stress management strategies can help you bring things back into balance.
- **Limit unhealthy mental habits like worrying.** Try to avoid becoming absorbed by repetitive mental habits—negative thoughts about yourself and the world that suck up time, drain your energy, and trigger feelings of anxiety, fear, and depression.

More tips and strategies for taking care of yourself:

- **Appeal to your senses.** Stay calm and energized by appealing to the five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. Listen to music that lifts your mood, place flowers where you will see and smell them, massage your hands and feet, or sip a warm drink.
- **Engage in meaningful, creative work.** Do things that challenge your creativity and make you feel productive, whether or not you get paid for it—things like gardening, drawing, writing, playing an instrument, or building something in your workshop.
- **Get a pet.** Yes, pets are a responsibility, but caring for one makes you feel needed and loved. There is no love quite as unconditional as the love a pet can give. Animals can also get you out of the house for exercise and expose you to new people and places.
- **Make leisure time a priority.** Do things for no other reason than that it feels good to do them. Go to a funny movie, take a walk on the beach, listen to music, read a good book, or talk to a friend. Doing things just because they are fun is no indulgence. Play is an emotional and mental health necessity.
- **Make time for contemplation and appreciation.** Think about the things you’re grateful for. Meditate, pray, enjoy the sunset, or simply take a moment to pay attention to what is good, positive, and beautiful as you go about your day. Everyone is different; not all things will be equally beneficial to all people. Some people feel better relaxing and slowing down while others need more activity and more excitement or stimulation to feel better. The important thing is to find activities that you enjoy and that give you a boost.

**Supportive relationships: The foundation of emotional health**

No matter how much time you devote to improving your mental and emotional health, you will still need the company of others to feel and be your best. Humans are social creatures with an emotional need for relationships and positive connections to others. We’re not meant to survive, let alone thrive, in isolation. Our social brains crave companionship—even when experience has made us shy and distrustful of others. Social interaction—specifically talking to someone else about your problems—can also help to reduce stress. The key is to find a supportive relationship with someone who is a “good listener”—someone you can talk to regularly, preferably face-to-face, who will listen to you without a pre-existing agenda for how you should think or feel. A good listener will listen to the feelings behind your words, and won’t interrupt or judge or criticize you. The best way to find a good listener? Be a good listener yourself. Develop a friendship with someone you can talk to regularly, and then listen and support each other.

**Tips and strategies for connecting to others:**

- **Get out from behind your TV or computer screen.** Screens have their place but they will never have the same effect as an expression of interest or a reassuring touch. Communication is a largely nonverbal experience that requires you to be in direct contact with other people, so don’t neglect your real-world relationships in favor of virtual interaction.
- **Spend time daily, face-to-face, with people you like.** Make spending time with people you enjoy a priority. Choose friends, neighbors, colleagues, and family
members who are upbeat, positive, and interested in you. Take time to inquire about people you meet during the day that you like.

- **Volunteer.** Doing something that helps others has a beneficial effect on how you feel about yourself. The meaning and purpose you find in helping others will enrich and expand your life. There is no limit to the individual and group volunteer opportunities you can explore. Schools, churches, nonprofits, and charitable organization of all sorts depend on volunteers for their survival.

- **Be a joiner.** Join networking, social action, conservation, and special interest groups that meet on a regular basis. These groups offer wonderful opportunities for finding people with common interests—people you like being with who are potential friends.

## Risk factors for mental and emotional problems

Your mental and emotional health has been and will continue to be shaped by your experiences. Early childhood experiences are especially significant. Genetic and biological factors can also play a role, but these too can be changed by experience.

### Risk factors that can compromise mental and emotional health:

- **Poor connection or attachment to your primary caretaker early in life.** Feeling lonely, isolated, unsafe, confused, or abused as an infant or young child.
- **Traumas or serious losses, especially early in life.** Death of a parent or other traumatic experiences such as war or hospitalization.
- **Learned helplessness.** Negative experiences that lead to a belief that you’re helpless and that you have little control over the situations in your life.
- **Illness,** especially when it’s chronic, disabling, or isolates you from others.
- **Side effects of medications,** especially in older people who may be taking a variety of medications.
- **Substance abuse.** Alcohol and drug abuse can both cause mental health problems and make preexisting mental or emotional problems worse.

Whatever internal or external factors have shaped your mental and emotional health, it’s never too late to make changes that will improve your psychological well-being. Risk factors can be counteracted with protective factors, like strong relationships, a healthy lifestyle, and coping strategies for managing stress and negative emotions.

### When to seek professional help for emotional problems

If you’ve made consistent efforts to improve your mental and emotional health and you still don’t feel good—then it’s time to seek professional help. Because we are so socially attuned, input from a knowledgeable, caring professional can motivate us to do things for ourselves that we were not able to do on our own.
“101 Things To Do” Banner

Create, with your club and other students in your school, a list of activities students can do to feel good about themselves, develop a healthier way of thinking, feeling, moving, expanding their views...that not necessarily encompass screen time, things kids can do independently, low or no cost, etc. It is amazing what you and your peers come up with, to share those ideas is so rewarding! Banners are cheap to have made (try UPrinting.com), the banner below was less than $20, cheaper if using white background.