

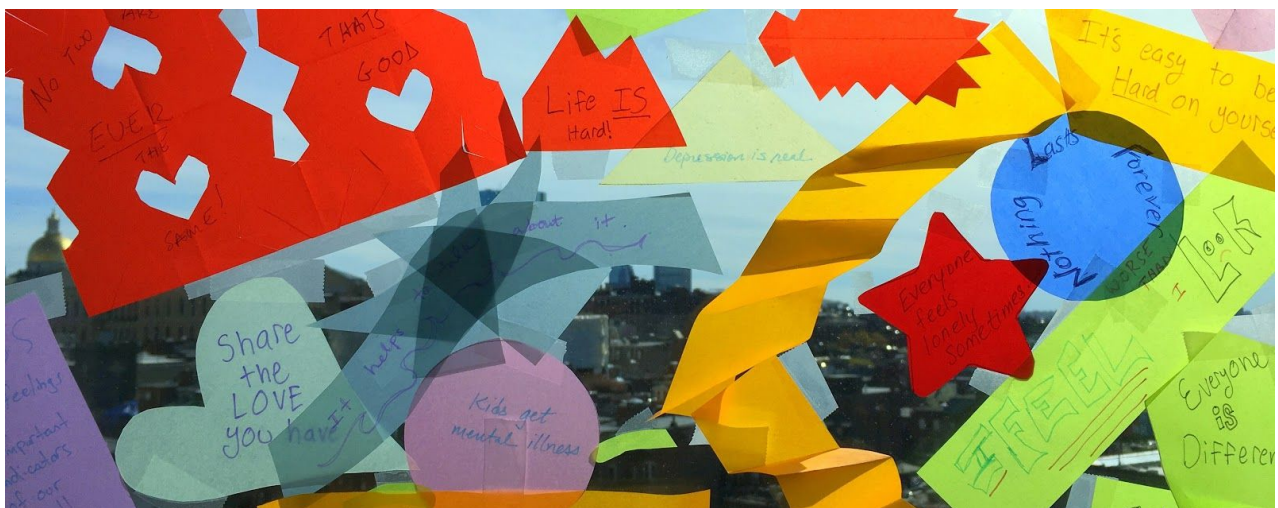
# Illuminating Mental Health Classroom Toolkit

*Illuminating Mental Health* is the result of an 8-month partnership between multimedia artist Elisa H. Hamilton ([www.ElisaHHamilton.com](http://www.ElisaHHamilton.com)) and The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds at Massachusetts General Hospital ([www.mghclaycenter.org](http://www.mghclaycenter.org)). The Clay Center is a practical, online educational resource dedicated to promoting and supporting the mental, emotional, and behavioral well-being of children, teens, and young adults. It is an online-only platform that offers approachable and engaging, multimedia content including original blogs, podcasts, and videos.

The artist and the Clay Center worked in partnership to create a prototype that could reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues. This workshop program uses education, dialogue and participatory artmaking in an effort to increase awareness and build knowledge about mental health. By bringing conversations about mental health out of the shadows and into the light, we can normalize conversations about mental health, and combat the stigma that prevents us from leading our fullest lives together.

This activity should not be considered as medical, health care, or behavioral health care advice. Nothing contained in this activity is intended to be used for medical diagnosis or treatment or as a substitute for consultation with a qualified healthcare professional. If you have concerns about your health, please contact your healthcare provider.

To learn more about the *Illuminating Mental Health* visit  
<https://illuminatingmentalhealth.weebly.com>



## WORKSHOP NEEDS

**Time** 60-90 minutes

**Participants** 3 or more, Ages 12+

**Space Needs** Window and nearby work table or other surface

### Materials\*

- Black fabric bag
- Printed mental health "truths"
- Assorted colors of vellum paper
- Sharpies and/or pens
- "Wall-Safe" tape
- Scissors
- **Optional** Stencils, Rulers

*\*You can find all of these materials at your local art supply store, or online at [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com).*

## PREPARING FOR THE WORKSHOP

Before making the choice to lead this workshop, facilitators should reflect on their own experience, skills, and boundaries. Conversations about mental health can be complex, and facilitators should be comfortable leading others through the discussions that may arise during the course of this workshop. In preparing for conversations about mental health, be sure to find out what support resources are available to your community at your institution, and in your local vicinity. Identifying these resources in advance of the workshop is essential. It is important for participants to know what support systems are available to them should they want to seek help or more information on mental health during or after the workshop.

Visit the Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds "Where to Turn" page for a listing of national and state mental health resources, as well as links to some of the programs and services available at Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston: [www.mghclaycenter.org/where-to-turn/](http://www.mghclaycenter.org/where-to-turn/)

In advance of the program, you will need to prepare your materials. Print out the included mental health truths on 8-½ x 11 paper. Cut the paper into individual slips of text, fold the slips, and place them into the fabric bag. Assemble the vellum paper, scissors, and other materials in the workspace area.

For Part One of the program, be sure that you are in a space that allows for everyone to sit comfortably in a circle either in chairs, or on the floor, depending on the comfort level of participants. For Parts Two and Three, you will need a window that is physically accessible to all

participants. The window can be in the same location as Part One, or in a different location. You will need a work table or other work area adjacent to the window.

## THE WORKSHOP

### **Part One. Illuminating Through Education & Dialogue** **EDUCATION & CONVERSATION**

Invite participants to sit in a circle. If participants don't yet know one another, go around the circle to share names, and something fun about themselves like their favorite dessert, or something that they are looking forward to doing that weekend. Giving everyone the opportunity to speak and share something about themselves before the activity begins will help to create a comfortable space for participants to share their thoughts.

Explain to participants that today you'll be doing an activity about mental health that will start with some conversation, and then will move into an art making activity that you'll all be doing together. Begin the discussion by asking participants what they know about the word stigma. Engage participants in a conversation about stigma including what it is, how it manifests, and what some of the negative consequences can be.

***See the stigma info sheet for tips.***

Bring the conversation towards the stigma around mental health issues and explain to participants that one way to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues is to regularly have conversations about mental health. Talking about mental health, and putting mental health truths out into the open reduces stigma, and works to shift society's negative perceptions of those who face mental health challenges.

Present the bag full of mental health truths and explain that in this activity, we'll be doing just that: having open conversations about mental health. Pass the fabric bag around the circle to participants and ask each participant to remove a slip of paper from the bag, and to read it aloud. After each truth is read, facilitate a group discussion about each one.

***See the mental health truth discussion prompts for tips.***

After everyone has read a truth, or all of the truths have been read, explain that the black bag represents stigma— it is opaque and hides the truth about mental health issues— and that truths that were pulled out show that in this activity we are making the unseen, seen, and illuminating mental health.

## **Part Two. Illuminating Through Art**

### **PROCESSING & CONNECTING THROUGH COLLABORATIVE MAKING**

Lead the participants to a window, and present the art-making materials listed above. Ask each participant to hold a strip of vellum while you explain the activity. Ask them to take note of the smoothness of the paper and the way it can flex and fold; it's a flat piece of paper, but can become three-dimensional depending on how you use it. Demonstrate that when you hold the vellum up to the light, it appears to glow.

Explain to participants that a collage is a type of art that's made up of many different pieces coming together to create a whole. Tell participants that together you will be creating an "illuminated collage" that will literally shine light on mental health.

Using the provided materials, invite participants to create a collage pieces by doing one of three things:

1. Share your own mental health truth
2. Respond to one (or a few) of the mental health truths that was read aloud
3. Share a feeling that you recently had or are having

Ask participants to collaboratively create the collage directly on the window. Participants can write on the vellum paper in words and/or drawings, they can cut and fold the vellum paper into shapes and overlap colors of paper. Tell participants to try tape their creations to the window as they go, and use as many pieces of paper as they want to. Encourage participants to connect their own pieces to other pieces on the glass, and to grow the collage together. The facilitator should consider creating the first collage piece to put onto the window to break the ice.

## **Part Three. Illuminating Through Reflection and Sharing**

### **REFLECTING & SHARING**

When everyone feels like the collage is complete, invite participants to step back to behold their collaborative creation, and to reflect on the process of making it. Ask everyone to share something that they notice about one or two of the collage pieces. You can also invite participants to say something about the collage pieces that they contributed, if they wish to do so. Ask participants to reflect on the process of the whole workshop, and ask them what they learned. Consider leaving the collage up for a few days to reflect on again later.

Encourage participants to take a piece of the collage home to share with someone they care about. They can share the collage piece, as well as tell that person about the activity, and what they shared and learned. If there are extra materials, consider allowing participants to take some vellum home to do the activity again there.

In closing the program be sure to share support resources with participants in case anyone would like more information, or wants to seek support for any reason. Remind participants that it is always ok to ask for help, and there are support resources available for them.



The mental health truths contained on the next page were adapted from [“Dispelling Myths On Mental Illness” by Sarah Powell \(2015\)](#) and [“Mental Health Myths and Facts,” by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services \(2017\)](#).

## Mental Health Truths

6 out of 10 of people with a mental illness won't seek out the help they need due to the stigma associated with being labelled mentally ill.

Half of all mental health disorders show first signs before a person turns 14 years old, and three quarters of mental health disorders begin before age 24.

One in five young people suffer from a mental illness. Of those teenagers, only thirty percent will be diagnosed and will be able to receive proper care.

Depression is real. Some people have the misconception that a person can just "cheer up" or "shake it off." Depression is a serious medical condition that affects the biological functioning of our bodies. But, there are treatments can help address the symptoms of depression.

Mental illnesses are disorders of brain function. Having a mental illness is not a choice or a failing.

Mental illnesses occur at similar rates around the world, in every culture and in all socioeconomic groups.

We don't always need new activities to get more pleasure, sometimes we just need to find the joy in the ones we've already got. Trying to be optimistic doesn't mean ignoring the uglier sides of life, it just means focusing on the positive as much as we can.

Mental health is just as important as physical health.

Everyone can help fight the stigma surrounding mental illness by speaking and acting in ways that respect the personal dignity of those affected. When you work to reduce stigma, you're helping everyone affected by a condition.

Try relaxing in a warm bath once a week. Adding Epsom salts will relieve sore muscles and help boost magnesium levels, which can be depleted by stress.

A mental illness doesn't make someone any less of a person. They're not broken or weird; they just have different experiences that not everyone has to cope with.

Chill out with a furry friend! Being with animals lowers stress hormones which fosters feelings of happiness. If you don't have a pet, hang out with a friend who does, or volunteer at a shelter.

Boost your brain power by treating yourself to a couple pieces of dark chocolate every few days. The natural ingredients in chocolate are thought to work together to make you more alert!

Mental health problems affect all of us directly or indirectly because the stigma around mental illness prevents us from having real conversations about how we are feeling.

# Stigma Info Sheet

*Use this information to guide the opening discussion about stigma.*

## **What is stigma?**

Stigma is the result of negative stereotypes about certain groups of people that lead to discrimination, and discrimination is unfair treatment of someone due to their identity. For example, someone with a mental health disorder might be treated unkindly because of their condition. This is discrimination, and it's the result of stigma.

## **What causes stigma?**

Stigma is caused by dominant cultural beliefs that link certain groups of people to negative stereotypes. Studies have found that the media plays a significant role in shaping public opinions about mental health and illness. People with mental health conditions are often depicted as dangerous, violent and unpredictable which is inaccurate for the majority of individuals with a mental health condition. Movies and TV frequently show negative images and stereotypes about mental health conditions, and these negative representations have been strongly linked to the public's fears and misunderstanding of those with mental conditions.

## **What are the negative results of stigma?**

There are many negative consequences to the public misperceptions and fears of those with mental conditions. Stereotypes about mental health conditions can cause bullying, and keep people from getting the care they need because they are ashamed and are afraid to ask for help. Due to stigma, sometimes people lose self-esteem and have difficulty making friends. Experiences of stigma and discrimination keep us from living our fullest lives because we can't be ourselves or connect fully to one another.

## Mental Health Truths Discussion Prompts

*Use these questions to activate conversation as the mental health truths are read aloud.*

6 out of 10 of people with a mental illness won't seek out the help they need due to the stigma associated with being labelled mentally ill.

*Have you heard the word stigma before? Does anyone know what it is?*

*Have you heard of stereotypes before? How do stereotypes play into stigma?*

Mental health is just as important as physical health.

*Do you think we pay as much attention to our physical health as our mental health?*

*If not, what are some of the reasons?*

Half of all mental health disorders show first signs before a person turns 14 years old, and three quarters of mental health disorders begin before age 24.

*Do you know what a mental health disorder is?*

One in five young people suffer from a mental illness. Of those teenagers, only thirty percent will be diagnosed and will be able to receive proper care.

*What are some of the reasons you think those teenagers might not get the care that they need?*

Depression is real. Some people have the misconception that a person can just "cheer up" or "shake it off." Depression is a serious medical condition that affects the biological functioning of our bodies. But, there are treatments can help address the symptoms of depression.

*Has anyone ever heard someone say that depression isn't a real thing before?*

Mental illnesses are disorders of brain function. Having a mental illness is not a choice or a failing.

*Has anyone here felt stressed before? Did you **choose** to feel that way?*

*What do you think contributed to the stress you felt?*

Mental illnesses occur at similar rates around the world, in every culture and in all socioeconomic groups.

*Did you know that? Do you think that this is something that other people know? Do you think that has something to do with all of us being human?*

We don't always need new activities to get more pleasure, sometimes we just need to find the joy in the ones we've already got. Trying to be optimistic doesn't mean ignoring the uglier sides of life, it just means focusing on the positive as much as we can.

*What are some activities that you do outside of school/work?*

*Why do you do them and what do you enjoy about them?*



Everyone can help fight the stigma surrounding mental illness by speaking and acting in ways that respect the personal dignity of those affected. When you work to reduce stigma, you're helping everyone affected by a condition.

*Has anyone ever been going through something and then seen a celebrity in the news saying it's something they've gone through, too? How did that make you feel?*

*When celebrities share their own experiences struggling with mental health, how do you think that reduces stigma?*

Try relaxing in a warm bath once a week. Adding Epsom salts will relieve sore muscles and help boost magnesium levels, which can be depleted by stress.

*Do you think that baths are relaxing?*

*Does anyone like to take baths instead of showers?*

A mental illness doesn't make someone any less of a person. They're not broken or weird; they just have different experiences that not everyone has to cope with.

*Do you think that sharing our different life experiences with each other can help us understand and support each other better? Why?*

Chill out with a furry friend! Being with animals lowers stress hormones which fosters feelings of happiness. If you don't have a pet, hang out with a friend who does, or volunteer at a shelter.

*Does anyone have a pet at home? Why kinds and what are their names?*

*How does it make you feel to hang out with you pet, or a friend's pet?*

Boost your brain power by treating yourself to a couple pieces of dark chocolate every few days. The natural ingredients in chocolate are thought to work together to make you more alert.

*Did you know that dark chocolate is good for your brain?*

*If you don't like dark chocolate, what are some other treats you enjoy eating, and how do they make you feel?*

Mental health problems affect all of us directly or indirectly because the stigma around mental illness prevents us from having real conversations about how we are feeling.

*When someone asks you how you are, do you always share how you're really feeling at that moment? When you ask someone how they are, do you wait to really listen to their answer?*

*How do you think changing the way we share our feelings can help reduce stigma?*