



Room In The Inn: Mental Health Matters

Lesson Plan 7th - 9th Grade

Curriculum Connections: Health and Wellness, English, Language Arts, Reading

Thematic Connections: Citizenship, Community, Self-Care, Compassion

Overview:

The goal of this lesson is to create an awareness of an individual's mental health and its impact on the world. It is important for this age group to learn about this for the following reasons:

- Prepares students for engaging in community action and advocacy for mental health resources
- Fosters self-awareness for a student's own actions and mental and emotional wellness
- Begins broadening students' understanding of the impact of mental wellness on a community

Goals for this unit:

- Build awareness of students' mental and emotional wellness
- Begin laying a foundation for understanding the impact of mental and emotional wellness on the world
- Provide tangible means for students to contribute to making their community safe for all people

In this lesson plan we've provided suggested videos, discussion questions, and an activity – we strongly encourage group discussion and the activity to ensure students are learning through participation.

Before leading your group through these materials, read the one-pager "Who are the homeless?: Mental Health and Homelessness." This document will explain why understanding mental health is helpful as we seek to be in community with our neighbors who are experiencing homelessness.

Discussion Questions BEFORE Reading:

- What does it mean to be aware of your emotions?
- How do your emotions impact those around you?
- Do you ever feel comfortable sharing your thoughts and emotions with others? Are there friends or family members with whom you feel more comfortable sharing thoughts and feelings?

Read the one-pager "Who are the homeless?: Mental Health and Homelessness"

Discussion Questions:

- How does poor mental health make people more susceptible to factors that increase the likelihood that someone may experience homelessness?
- On the flip side, how does experiencing homelessness amplify poor mental health?
- What percentage of those experiencing homelessness are also experiencing a form of mental illness?
- What resources exist for those experiencing poor mental health and homelessness?
- What ways can you get involved in promoting better mental health resources in your community?

Read the book *Finding Perfect* by Elly Swartz about a girl living with OCD:

<https://www.amazon.com/Finding-Perfect-Elly-Swartz/dp/1250294134>

Discussion Questions (adapted from Elly Swartz's guide):

- Hannah says, "Didn't you ever do something wrong so you could do something right?" Locate examples from the book when characters do something wrong so they can ultimately do something right? Explain why you think their behaviors are justified or not.
- What do you think would and would not have been different for Molly if her mother had not taken the job in Toronto? Why?
- What are coping mechanisms?
- How do the various characters in the book cope with challenges? In what ways do Molly, Ian, Kate, Hannah, and Mom cope with the various challenges that present themselves? Do you think those coping mechanisms are effective and/or positive over time?
- What prevents various characters in the book from saying what they want to say? Consider: fear of the truth, fear of being stigmatized, fear of disappointing others, fear of discomfort, fear of conflict.
- Why do you think Molly was not able to share her secret with anyone but was able to participate and perform openly in the poetry slam contest? Why do you think she was ultimately able to reveal her secret to Ian?
- Explain why the casual use of a phrase like, "I am so OCD," is both incorrect and insensitive. By the end of the story, how do you think Molly would react to the uninformed use of this phrase?

Read the book *My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss together:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iR0-5f-L_LQ

Discussion Questions:

- What do the different colors represent in the book?
- On "orange days" the author says they feel like a circus seal. What do you think it means to feel like a circus seal?
- On "green days" the author says they are a cool and quiet fish. What do you think it means to be a cool and quiet fish?
- The author says that "purple days" are sad days. What color are your sad days?
- "Pink days" are the author's happy days. What color are you on your happy days? What about your mad days?
- What color day are you having today?

Suggested Videos:

Watch this video where kids talk about mental health (6min):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxIDKZH3-E>

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the emotions you try to hide most from everyone else?
- Have you ever felt like Sasha after you did not make the grade you wanted on a test or project?
- Sasha's mom suggests that Sasha should take a break and do something she enjoys when she feels stressed. This break is a practice of self-care. What are some ways you practice self-care or what are things you do to take a break from stressful things occupying your thoughts?
- Andre experiences a constant stream of negative thoughts running through his head. Sometimes his stream turns into a river of negative thoughts. Have you ever had a similar experience? What did you do?
- What are some things we can do to help others feel comfortable sharing how they are feeling?

Watch this Ted Talk from Max about mental health (20min):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKeespQytpE>

Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever experienced a difficult time like Max and his family? Who were the people that helped you out?
- Max assumes his brother, Eli, is lazy and feels that it is unfair that Eli is allowed to miss school so often. Max resents Eli for this. Max later finds out that Eli misses school because he struggles with mental health. How do our assumptions about one another's circumstances affect our relationships?
- Why do you think society's reaction to physical illness is so different from their reaction to mental illness?
- What is stigma?
- Do you think society is intentionally keeping mental health invisible?
- Who are safe people in your life that you can talk to when you are experiencing negative emotions and stress?

Watch Pixar's "Inside Out" (1hr 30min)

Discussion Questions:

- In the movie we get to see a cartoon version of the different emotions and thought processes that go on inside our minds as we react to different things in life. Do you ever feel like your different emotions are fighting over the driver's seat?
- Each character is driven by a primary emotion. Riley is driven by Joy, Mom is driven by sadness, and Dad is driven by anger. If you had to name the emotion that drives you, which one would it be? Is there an emotion that you feel you lean towards throughout your typical day?
- Riley's core memories make up her personality and she associates those memories with joy, that is why they appear yellow. When Riley first moves to San Francisco, sadness begins touching those core memories and they turn blue. Have you ever had a memory that made you feel joy change to make you feel a different emotion? (Ex: You used to enjoy riding your bike but then you fell off and hurt yourself. The fall makes you fearful of riding your bike fast.)
- When we grow up or make a big change in life, sometimes the things we enjoy doing or people we enjoy spending time with also changes. How do you feel about changes that happen in your own life? What big changes have you had to go through?
- Riley eventually talks to her parents about the emotions she experiences after their move. Who are the people you can talk to when you are experiencing difficult emotions?

Activity Options:

Writing:

- Have students write encouraging notes to friends or family. You could even pick out a specific homeroom or club to have students write encouraging notes to their peers.

Art:

- Have students collaborate to make a "Mental Health Check Chart" for the classroom. Use this as a tool for students to express themselves in the classroom.
- If you haven't used the "Kindness Rocks" activity yet, check it out.

Service Opportunities:

- Invite the school psychologist or guidance counselor to class. Have them introduce themselves and talk about how they help at school.

