Lesson plan: Discuss student mental health with "On Our Minds" podcast

Overview

In this activity you and your students will use an episode of the fantastic "On Our Minds" podcast, hosted and created by the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs. Students will warm up with a short writing prompt focused on prior knowledge & use the podcast as a text-based class conversation. When finished listening, you can go a high-tech route or low-tech route for students to show their thinking, connect with classmates and apply their knowledge.

For a tech-based option, we've created a Parlay template (an online conversation tool) for students to engage in. Want to do an offline discussion? Click here for the conversation questions from the Parlay or see below.

Subjects

Health, English/ELA and any class where students and educators may be open to learning about adolescent mental health

Estimated Time

One 45-60 minute period

Grade Level

8-12

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Understand and apply person-first (i.e. a person with depression vs a depressed person) language around feelings and mental health
- Learn strategies for discussing their own mental health

Before Starting

Set up students for a discussion on mental health and routines for creating a safe space.

Remind them that when talking about examples from their life to not use names (say "someone I know" instead of someone's specific name) and that what they choose to share may leave the room (can't guarantee their privacy, while it will be encouraged).

Check out Teaching for Justice's "Let's Talk" guide for suggestions on creating norms (page 25), navigating polarized topics and laying the groundwork for critical conversations.

Warm up question & discussion (10 mins)

Give students a few minutes to respond to this question in writing:

In your own words, what is "mental health"? Elaborate. How have you come to understand mental health in this way?

Have students share ideas and capture those ideas on the board or in groups.

What understandings were shared? What differences appeared? What did they notice?

Take 5-10 minutes to share out, then see if students can individually or with a partner create a class definition that synthesizes ideas. Or use the following: We will define mental health as how we feel emotionally, socially or the state of our general well-being.

Main Activity (35-50 minutes)

Bringing podcasts into the classroom can be an awesome way to engage students. To encourage active listening check out these tips:

a. The podcast can certainly be assigned for individual or whole-class listens. If assigned individually, encourage students to listen while moving (like walking or cleaning their room), sketchnoting (annotation technique), or just responding in a notebook.
b. It can be helpful to break the podcast into two parts and incorporate other topics, or break it up over two days.
    i. **Part 1 (minute 0:00-10:04)** focuses on *how language matters* when talking about mental health and using person-first language.
    ii. **Part 2 (10:05)** focuses on advice for *how to start* talking about mental health
c. This lesson can be delivered online or offline.
    i. To have an online dialogue with students, use this Parlay link to make a copy of your own and share with your students to complete.
    ii. To deliver this activity as a whole group or without digital access for students, plan on playing the podcast aloud for everyone to hear. Then, use the "turn and talk" notes below to weave induscission while listening altogether before using the Conversation Questions.

1. Locate the "How do I start a conversation about mental health?" podcast on the On Our Minds podcast website. This podcast can be listened to through a computer or mobile device. The episode can be streamed through an internet browser or on several podcast streaming apps.

2. Decide how you want students to listen (as a whole group, in partners, or individually). Check out the pause notes below for helpful places to stop & think with students.

3. When finished listening to the podcast, share the Parlay link with students and walk through the task, or use the Conversation Questions below if preferred, or if Parlay is unavailable to students.

Please note: If using the Parlay, you will need to click the pink "USE THIS TOPIC" button, and then you can make any additional changes you want to the prompts or instructions. Both Google and Microsoft log-ins may be used or students can register using school email. T*he settings are defaulted to "anonymous" when students post, which can be toggled (teacher will be able to see who is who but students will not as they post).*

Stop & Think (pause notes)

a. Why can it be difficult to open up about feelings? (3:16)

b. "..the person-first recovery model prioritizes the human being first." For example, in Spanish, one says "tengo miedo", which translates literally to "I have fear." Why does how we talk about things like mental health and the words we use matter? (6:14)

c. Why may it be helpful to use person-first language? How does not identifying completely with a feeling (versus understanding our thinking about our feeling) have an impact on how we move through feelings?

d. What are some strategies for how teens start to talk about their feelings? (10:20)

e. "Self-care isn't all bubble baths and candles, it's understanding your boundaries, understanding where you need to prioritize time for yourself. " (14:30)

Optional Extensions

1. Share the WellBeings.org "Mental Health Language Guide" and ask students to explore and report back on any of the numerous, high quality resources.
2. Looking for a better feeling word than "I'm fine"? Having the right word to describe a feeling & knowing *how they feel* is a frequently reported teen need. Share the Feeling Wheel next time you circle up with students or distribute as a resource for self-understanding and self reflection.
3. Take a look at our site Journalism in Action, which explores the ways journalists have covered U.S. history as it happened. The site includes a case study on the ways the media has portrayed mental health for over a century.
4. Be sure to check out the other episodes of "On Our Mind" and share them with students.

Conversation Questions

Using the Student Reporting Lab's podcast "On Our Mind", listen to the episode titled "How do I start a conversation about mental health?"

Choose 3 of the 5 questions and respond to them in your own words, being sure to use ideas and information you learned about from the podcast. You can also use examples from your own life, but respect other people's privacy. (Rather than using your friend's name, just refer to them as

"someone you know" or "a friend I was supporting." You're welcome to use examples from your own experiences, but are not required to.

1. What does it mean to use “person first language” and why does it matter? How might it look in action when talking about mental health and wellness? (6:14)

2. "Self-care isn't all bubble baths and candles, it's understanding your boundaries, understanding where you need to prioritize time for yourself" (14:30). How do you think about self-care? How can thinking about self-care as personal & healthy boundaries be a helpful strategy?

3. Dr. Siegel claims: "getting really enough and good sleep is the number one issue I want to say to all adolescents" (17:21) because of the impacts it can have on the body and brain. What do you think? How would you reorganize your school's schedule to help teens get better quality sleep? Why?

4. Check out the Mental Health Language Guide from Well Beings. Explore a resource of your choosing (things like "Language Basics, "Do's & Don'ts of Mental Health Conversations"). What was the resource you explored? What did you learn? How can studying this resource help us understand mental health and wellness better?

5. What does it look like when you feel like someone really listens to you well or that you feel comfortable talking about how you feel?

6. When you think about mental health, what questions do you have or what came up for you that you're curious about? How come? Was there anything in the podcast that you wanted to hear more about or learn more about?

BONUS: Check out the Feeling Wheel to learn some better words to describe what feelings you're experiencing.


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