**Lesson 6: Reducing Behavioral Health Stigma and Removing Barriers**

**Overview**: This lesson targets reducing barriers to recognizing, reaching out and use resources to support ME health. Students will identify individual and societal barriers to accessing ME health resources. Activities will also target how to reduce ME health stigma and support ME health.

National Health Education Standards

**Standard 1:** Students comprehend functional health knowledge to enhance health.

**Standard 3:** Students demonstrate health literacy by accessing valid and reliable health information, products, and services to enhance health.

**Standard 4:** Students demonstrate effective interpersonal communication skills to enhance health.

Healthy Behavior Outcome (HBO):

|  |
| --- |
| Students will recognize the negative impact stigma has on SUD and mental health and will use person-first language to reduce the stigma. |

**Lesson Objective**- Students will be able to:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Objective** | **Assessment** |
| 1. Define stigma (self, public, and structural) related to SUD and mental health. | Attachment 6.1b – Beat the Stigma |
| 1. Identify the negative impact of these stigmas (self, public, and structural) on the recovery process for people struggling with SUD. | Attachment 6.1b – Beat the Stigma |
| 1. Practice using stigma reducing or person-first language to reduce the stigma associated with SUD and mental health. | Attachment 6.1b – Beat the Stigma |
| 1. Recognize barriers to reaching out to ME health resources and suggest alternatives to overcome the barriers. | Attachment 6.2 – Overcome Barriers to Support ME Health  Attachment 6.3 – Asking for Help |

*Note:*

* Today’s lesson addresses sensitive topics about mental and emotional health. If you are having feelings, emotions, or thoughts you should feel comfortable to reach out to me or a trusted adult at school. (Remind students of your procedures if students need to use a regulation or mindfulness tool or strategy.)
* Reminder students of your classroom expectations and norms to create a safe supportive environment. Refer to Lessons 3, 4, and 5 to recognize, reach out and use resources to support ME health.
* Contact school mental health staff to e sure they are available to students.

Introduction:

* Today we will learn how to reduce the barriers to recognize, reach out and use resources to support ME health. We have learned how to recognize, reach out and use resources, but we need to address the reasons why people avoid or resist asking for help or accessing resources.
* *\*Reset or remind about students about your guidelines, procedures and expectations for a safe and supportive environment. As we talk about barriers and stigma our goal is to learn more about these issues. These topics might be sensitive to you and the people you care about. As we learn about stigma and barriers, we will address words, topics and actions that have a negative impact. Our discussion or use of those words are intended to create awareness and not hurt others.*
* Let’s brainstorm reasons why people do not recognize, reach out or use resources to support our mental health. (Teachers can use crumbled paper, post it notes, or another idea collector). Remind students the prompt is to address all three elements: recognize, reach out and resources. To prompt students’ thoughts, they could think about categories access to resources, financial, limited awareness or education, and stigma.
* Stigma and negative perceptions surrounding mental health and help-seeking is the one of the most common reasons young people are reluctant to reach out for help. Additional barriers include confidentiality and trust, financial, lack of access or availability to professionals and services.
* We’ll first address the reluctance to reaching out due to stigma. Then we’ll address the barriers to access mental health resources and services.

Teaching Steps:

* **Recognize, Reach Out,** and **Resources** are the three Rs to remember to support mental and emotional health. Education and awareness are important for students, family members and friends to feel safe and comfortable to reach out and support ME health.
* **Recognize** – is to notice the signs a mental health concern.
  + Do we know about our mental health so we can recognize our feelings, emotions, moods as well as strong emotions, overwhelming feelings, and urgent signs?
* **Reach Out** – share that you noticed a concern and you would like to help (or need help)
  + Do we feel comfortable and confident to talk about our ME health or to ask a resource for help and support?
* **Resources** – connect with a trusted adult, school, or community resource.
  + Do we know the resources, how they can help and can access the resources?

Activity 1: Stigma

* What is stigma? Stigma is a set of negative and unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something. Some would describe stigma as labeling, stereotyping, and discrimination.
* Why is it important to know about stigma? Stigma affects people by keeping them from receiving the care and treatment they need to live full and productive lives ([LINK](https://www.tn.gov/behavioral-health/stigma.html)).
  + Stigma can influence people consciously and unconsciously. Stigma appears in three forms:
    - **Public** - Discrimination and devaluation by others.  Stigma in the public sphere can refer to stereotypes of people with behavioral health conditions. Belief in those stereotypes and actions taken in response can affect job prospects, housing decisions, even the quality of healthcare that they receive.
    - **Systemic** - Reduced access to care and resources due to policies. Systemic stigma exists when those public stigma stereotypes are embodied in laws, institutions, and organizations that regulate or influence society. While public stigma affects individuals or smaller groups, systemic stigma affects large groups of people.
    - **Self** - Internalization of negative stereotypes. Internalized stigma affects a person's self-esteem and self-efficacy leading to persistent doubt and hopelessness.
  + [**Link**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49mfPFTZsHs)to video about the stigma around children’s mental health.
* What can I do to reduce the stigma around mental health?
  + Words matter
  + Talk about ME health.
  + Share how you are feeling.
  + Focus on strengths and be positive
  + Use person first language
  + Avoid shaming, judgment, or using stigmatizing or discriminating language
  + Mental health is health.
  + Be honest about treatment that it is like any other illness or injury.
  + Educate yourself about mental health
  + Show compassion and empathy.
  + Support others to share feelings and support ME health.
  + Recognize barriers to support others to overcome those barriers.
* Advocate for ME health – Recognize, Reach Out, and Resources
  + Attachment 5.1 - Words Matter Practice
    - *Note.* This activity is similar to Lesson 9 in the HELPs Substance Use Prevention unit. This can be a refresher or used in combination with that lesson.
  + We can find stigma in the words we use. To reduce stigma, we need to use person-first language as well as terms that are safe and support of mental health. We want to support and encourage people to recognize, reach out and use resources to support ME health.
  + Use Attachment 5.1a to share words and phrases that can stigmatize behavioral health. This table can be used to reinforce ways we can use our words to support others, rather than stigmatize. Then use Attachment 5.1b to practice recognize stigmatizing words and then rewrite the sentence to “beat the stigma.”
    - \**Note.* This activity may prompt students to discuss suicide. if you need more information and guidance language for talking about suicide ([LINK](https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/words-matter-suicide-language-guide.pdf))
    - \*You can also take the Beat the Stigma Challenge ([LINK](https://beatthestigma.org/)) to answer 10 questions in 60 seconds about behavioral health stigma OR use Attachment 3.

Activity 3: Supporting ME Health by Removing Barriers

* *Teacher Notes –* In Lesson 4 we identified resources that support ME health. Have students review their list of tools, resources, and professionals who can support ME.
* Who are trusted adults in your life that you could go to?
  + Share a list of trusted adults at home, school, and in the community (mental health professionals).
* What are community resources that would be helpful if we needed ME health support?
  + School Resources (Teachers add a list of school resources that support mental and emotional health)
  + Health Resources including pediatricians, family physicians, and mental/behavioral health counselors.
  + Community Resources:
  + Here are state and national resources:
    - If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org/)
    - 988 Fact Sheet: <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/988-factsheet.pdf>
    - SAMHSA’s National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) (also known as the Treatment Referral Routing Service), or TTY: 1-800-487-4889 is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service, in English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. This service provides referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations.
    - Read more about the [HELP4U text messaging service](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline/help4u)
    - Visit the [online treatment locator](https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/), or send your zip code via text message: 435748 (HELP4U) to find help near you.
    - While we have a comprehensive list of resources that support ME health. Why don’t people seek help for a mental health concern? There are barriers to accessing and using resources (brainstorm a list and organize).
    - Financial (cost, transportation, time, insurance, missing work))
    - Difficulty in finding help (e.g. lack of professional services, supports, long wait time)
* Stigma
  + Individual perceived barriers (e.g. no one cares, it’s a burden, not worth the time, it won’t get better)
  + I can do it myself
  + Let’s try to identify barriers and how we might think about overcome those barriers. Use the resources available on Erika’s Lighthouse ([LINK](https://www.erikaslighthouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Overcoming-Barriers-to-Asking-for-Help-Worksheet.pdf)) for additional information about overcoming barriers.
* Use Attachment 6.2 to identify the barrier and strategies to overcome the barrier.

Activity 4: Recognize, Reach Out and use Resources Practice.

* Read each of the following scenarios in Attachment 6.3. Identify the support that is needed, possible barriers, a person or resource who can help, and how the character can start the conversation to reach out to a resource.
* *Scenario 1* - Jake and his partner just broke up last week after 6 months of dating. He is on his way to class and sees his ex-kissing another person. He is feeling a lot of intense emotions but doesn’t want to embarrass himself or get in trouble. Who can Jake go to for help and what can he say to receive the help he needs?
* *Answers:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Recognize – Is there a reason to be concerned? | * Strong feelings |
| * Reach Out - Should you reach out? Why? | * Feelings of pride or the thought that he can deal with it himself and doesn’t need help. |
| * Resources: Who can Jake talk to? | * A teacher, dean, administrator, coach, club leader, etc. |
| * Possible barriers: | * Social stigma of reaching out for help. |
| * What can Jake say to receive the help he needs? | * “I don’t want to get in trouble or embarrass myself, so I really need some help in dealing with how angry I am right now.” |

* *Scenario 2* - It has been over a year since Ashley’s grandmother passed away. She continues to have trouble concentrating, making decisions, and she is still experiencing periods of extreme grief, especially during the summer when she would spend so much time with her grandmother. School is ending and Ashley wants to prepare for the intensity of these emotions as summer approaches. Who can Ashley talk to and what could she say to receive the help she needs?
* *Answers:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Recognize – Is there a reason to be concerned? | * Hopelessness - that this is just the way things are now. |
| * Reach Out - Should you reach out? Why? | * Yes, strong emotions and possible overwhelming feelings |
| * Resources: Who can Jake talk to? | * Ask her parents or guardians about seeing a therapist |
| * Possible barriers: | * Financial, finding help, stigma, or perceived barriers. |
| * What can Ashley say to receive the help he needs? | * “I am still missing grandma so much. I am having a hard time concentrating, making decisions, and I still cry almost every day because I miss the time we spent together. I just don’t know how to cope with all these feelings, and I need someone to help me.” |

* *Scenario 3* - Charlie has not been feeling himself lately and he doesn’t understand why? He has great friends, he is doing well in school, and he has a supportive family. Charlie is concerned that he is lacking energy and has lost the motivation to participate in activities he used to enjoy. Who can Charlie talk to and what could he say to receive the help he needs?
* *Answers:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Recognize – Is there a reason to be concerned? | * Strong emotions – feeling tired. |
| * Reach Out - Should you reach out? Why? | * Yes because he has strong feelings and feeling overwhelmed and tired. |
| * Resources: Who can Jake talk to? | * The 988 Lifeline, a parent/guardian, school counselor, etc. |
| * Possible Barriers | * Financial, finding help, stigma, or perceived barriers. |
| * What can Charlie say to receive the help he needs? | * “I am not sure why I am feeling the way I am, but it doesn’t feel right, and I need some help to understand why I am feeling this way.” |

Closure:

* Prompt students to rate their level of confidence to recognizing, reaching out, and using resources to support mental health. Ask a second question if this rating has increased, decreased or remained the same after this lesson. Have students share a note to explain their rating and ask for additional resources if needed.

Lesson Resources:

* *These are additional materials outside of the Behavioral HELP Mental Emotional Health (ME Health) Curriculum that provide information that supports the development or implementation of the lesson.*
* [*https://www.etr.org/healthsmart2/assets/File/sample-lessons/MS-EmotionalAndMentalHealthLesson.pdf*](https://www.etr.org/healthsmart2/assets/File/sample-lessons/MS-EmotionalAndMentalHealthLesson.pdf)
* [*https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988*](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988)
* [*https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/988-factsheet.pdf*](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/988-factsheet.pdf)
* [*https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline*](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline)
* [*https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-wealth/202111/7-ways-ask-emotional-support#:~:text=Use%20assertive%20communication%20to%20find,and%20need%20somebody%20to%20listen*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-wealth/202111/7-ways-ask-emotional-support#:~:text=Use%20assertive%20communication%20to%20find,and%20need%20somebody%20to%20listen)*.*
* [*https://familydoctor.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Start-the-Conversation\_FINAL.pdf*](https://familydoctor.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Start-the-Conversation_FINAL.pdf)
* *\*Additional lessons that focus on suicide prevention are available at:* [*https://www.erikaslighthouse.org/*](https://www.erikaslighthouse.org/)

Attachment 6.1a: Words Matter – Reduce Stigma

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **g** | **Try this to “Beat the Stigma!”** |
| Mentally ill | * Person living with a mental health challenge or use the specific diagnosis (e.g. depression) |
| Crazy/insane/disturbed | * Person living with a mental health challenge/trauma |
| Depressed/schizophrenic | * Person living with depression/schizophrenia |
| Manic-depressive | * Person living with bipolar disorder |
| Addict/junkie/druggie | * Person living with substance use disorder, substance use challenge |
| Alcoholic | * Person living with alcohol use disorder or challenge |
| Ex-addict/clean | * Person in recovery |
| Mental Illness | * Mental health challenge or crisis |
| Committed Suicide | * Died by suicide or lost to suicide |
| Failed suicide | * Attempted suicide |

\*Additional examples can be found [here](https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2022/04/use-person-first-language-to-reduce-stigma/).



Attachment 6.1b: Beat the Stigma

1. What is stigma?
2. How does stigma impact mental health?

**Directions:** *Underline the stigmatizing word in the statement and rewrite the sentence using stigma reducing language.*

1. I can’t believe they take medication; they must be crazy.
2. Drug abusers can seek treatment for their addiction.
3. People with a mental health condition can achieve their goals and be successful.
4. My cousin is a schizophrenic and crazy.
5. Why can’t they figure it out, just get over it.



Attachment 6.2: Overcoming Barriers to Support ME

Read the situation and complete the table. Describe the barrier and a possible solution to overcome the barrier.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **SCENARIO** | **BARRIER** | **HOW TO OVERCOME THE BARRIER** |
| My mental health challenge or problem isn’t that bad or important. |  |  |
| I think my parents or family will be disappointed. |  |  |
| I don’t think my family has the time or money if I needed professional help. |  |  |
| I don’t know where to start. |  |  |

*If you recognize big emotions, overwhelming feelings, or signs of a mental health concern you must reach out to 988, a trusted adult, or a mental health professional. If you recognize urgent warning signs of a mental health concern or threats of violence to self or others of a mental health concern, please call 911*.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Rate your confidence to…** | **Not Confident** | **Confident** | **Very Confident** |
| Recognize big emotions, overwhelming feelings, and urgent warning signs. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Reach Out to ask for help for your own needs | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Reach out to help another person | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Resources | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Reduce stigma through your words and actions. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Is your confidence to recognize, reach out and use resources higher, lower or the same after this lesson?

1. Higher
2. Lower
3. Same

Attachment 6.3: Asking for Help

**Directions:** *For each of the following scenarios, identify the support that is needed, possible barriers, a person or resource who can help, and how the character can start the conversation to receive the support they need. You and your partner will have the option to share with the class the information you provided that leads to the character receiving the help they need.*

***Scenario 1*** – Jake and his partner just broke up last week after 6 months of dating. He is on his way to class and sees his ex-kissing another person. He is feeling a lot of intense emotions but doesn’t want to embarrass himself or get in trouble. Who can Jake go to for help and what can he say to receive the help he needs?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Recognize:** What do you notice about how they are feeling? | |  | |
| **Do you recognize… (circle if yes)** | | | |
| Strong Feeling | Overwhelming Feeling | | Urgent Sign |
| **Resources:** List a resource or trusted adult. | |  | |
| **Barriers:** What is a possible barrier that could prevent them from receiving the help? | |  | |
| **Reach Out:** Write what they should say to reach out and ask for help. | |  | |

***Scenario 2*** – It has been over a year since Ashley’s grandmother passed away. She continues to have trouble concentrating, making decisions, and she is still experiencing periods of extreme grief, especially during the summer when she would spend so much time with her grandmother. School is ending and Ashley wants to prepare for the intensity of these emotions as summer approaches. Who can Ashley talk to and what could she say to receive the help she needs?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Recognize:** What do you notice about how they are feeling? | |  | |
| **Do you recognize… (circle if yes)** | | | |
| Strong Feeling | Overwhelming Feeling | | Urgent Sign |
| **Resources:** List a resource or trusted adult. | |  | |
| **Barriers:** What is a possible barrier that could prevent them from receiving the help? | |  | |
| **Reach Out:** Write what they should say to reach out and ask for help. | |  | |

***Scenario 3*** – Charlie has not been feeling himself lately and he doesn’t understand why? He has great friends, he is doing well in school, and he has a supportive family. Charlie is concerned that he is lacking energy and has lost the motivation to participate in activities he used to enjoy. Who can Charlie talk to and what could he say to receive the help he needs?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Recognize:** What do you notice about how they are feeling? | |  | |
| **Do you recognize… (circle if yes)** | | | |
| Strong Feeling | Overwhelming Feeling | | Urgent Sign |
| **Resources:** List a resource or trusted adult. | |  | |
| **Barriers:** What is a possible barrier that could prevent them from receiving the help? | |  | |
| **Reach Out:** Write what they should say to reach out and ask for help. | |  | |