

My life It's cool to talk about it!



CANADIAN MENTAL
HEALTH ASSOCIATION
MONTREAL BRANCH

This colourful and action-oriented slogan is the launching pad for the prevention campaign run by the Montréal branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association aimed at teens in Montréal-area high schools. This campaign focuses on mental health as opposed to the disease. Its message is designed to encourage youth to act before serious problems arise, to break their solitude by talking about what's bothering them and to seek help. Any successful intervention in this area must target risk factors as well as the problems. Also emphasized is the importance of developing personal and social skills such as problem-solving and stress and emotional management.

What is mental health?

In terms used by today's youth, it is simply a matter of feeling good about yourself, having a good time and being happy. Defined more elaborately by the Québec committee for mental health¹, mental health is presented as being "the psychological balance of a person at a given time. It can be assessed based on the following elements: the level of subjective well-being, the exercise of mental abilities in one's daily life and the quality of relationships with the environment. It is influenced by multiple, interdependent factors such as economic, social, cultural, environmental and political conditions. Mental health is the result of mutual adaptation between a person and his environment. All conditions that hinder this adaptation, for example poverty and discrimination, constitute an obstacle to mental health. Conversely, all conditions which facilitate adaptation, support mental health for example — a healthy environment, equitable distribution of collective wealth and access to quality education." (Translation)

Health Canada² defines mental health as the "capacity of the individual, the group and the environment to interact with one another in ways that promote subjective well-being, the optimal development and use of mental abilities (cognitive, affective and relational), the achievement of individual and collective goals consistent with justice and the attainment and preservation of conditions of fundamental equality."

Adolescents and mental health

The beginning of adolescence is, almost by definition, a period of transition marked by important changes in all aspects of a child's functioning. The end of adolescence is more a moment of consolidation where youth adopt a new, more coherent identity and clearer objectives and commitments. Norma Haan (1981) proposes a practical way of approaching this difference, founded on Piaget's assimilation and accommodation concepts. According to Haan, the onset of adolescence is a period dominated by assimilation, whereas the end of adolescence would be more a period of accommodation.

An adolescent of 12 to 13 years of age assimilates a multitude of new physical, social and intellectual experiences. Before these new experiences can be completely integrated, the adolescent finds himself more or less in a period of perpetual imbalance. Older models are no longer operable and newer ones are not yet established. It is during this period that the peer group takes on great importance. Around the age of 16, 17 or 18, adolescents have begun to make the necessary accommodations, they gather the various threads to establish a new identity, new models of social relationships, new goals and new roles.



School and mental health

A school can intervene more coherently and effectively regarding the global health of its students if it understands its role in prevention and steers clear of confused messages. Such a school is better equipped to coordinate action within its own milieu, is more open to the community and so creates an environment conducive to students' growth.

In the same spirit, the school ensures that students receive the necessary support and personal aid needed to maintain a healthy and balanced frame of mind. To provide such support, those working in the school are knowledgeable about mental health issues affecting youth and understand their role in this respect.

As regards educational activities, a school committed to the mental health of its students organizes educational activities that promote the development of both personal and social abilities such as the resolution of conflicts and problems, self-esteem and self-affirmation, and stress and emotional management.

Finally, the school is also concerned with the students' feelings of academic competence and organizes its educational methods and evaluations accordingly.

1. Recommendations for the development and enrichment of mental health policies, 1994, p. 8-9.

2. Mental Health for Canadians: Striking a Balance, Ottawa, Supply and Services Canada, 1988, 23 p.

Impact of 40 years of change on adolescence

Adolescence is a stage of life which, until quite recently, was accorded relatively little attention. Prior to 1960, one was either a child or an adult, and the passage from one status to the other was relatively untroubled. Since then, Québec society has become more complex and, in parallel, so has adolescence. Though the winds of change which swept over Québec during the Quiet Revolution may have calmed down, they are still blowing. Today's adolescents are inevitably feeling their effects. They are thus, in some sort, assuming the impacts of Québec's social changes. In sum, these young people mirror the society which brought them into the world.

As part of a research project on suicide among youth, Francine Gratton³ makes a modest attempt to dissect that revolution in six points linking it with the current reality of adolescents. The table *Since 1960... Consequences for adolescents* presents an overview of her comments.

Being an adolescent today

Adolescence: a troubled period? A definite yes. Between the ages of 12 and 18, all youth make waves in their surroundings, because they are on a storm-tossed sea within themselves. This is a period marked by puberty, the body's tremendous growth surge, and by the application of formal thought which judges, criticizes, and calls the outside world into question.

This is also the period of contradictions. You need your parents, but you shut them out. You want someone to listen to you, but refuse to confide. You want to be free, but you still need the emotional security the family offers. Adolescents often wear their emotions on their sleeves: they are just as quick to laugh as to cry. This is a stage of life where imbalance, transition, experimentation, and challenging keep company with self-assertiveness, contrariness, and sometimes even marginalization.

Our constantly changing world is not always a help. Yesterday's guideposts have disappeared without necessarily having been replaced. Choices and possibilities have multiplied. Youth evolve in a playing field which often overwhelms them.

Formerly, the family was the model to analyse, to rebel against, but finally to replicate; the family of today is either splintered, run by a single parent or blended. The broken home is certainly not a marginal phenomenon. However,

Since 1960...

1. Traditional values have been called into question. The clergy has lost its hold. The educational system has been called into question and the family has been undergoing a constant metamorphosis.
2. The desire for autonomy and control over one's own destiny has become an ever greater urgency in Québec. Québec society has been studying, investigating, demanding, finding, and applying its own solutions in political, economic, and social spheres.
3. The Québec people have granted themselves the right to think, speak out, criticize, make demands, and create. The air waves teem with open lines, traditional codes are transgressed in literature and the other arts.
4. Québec has opened up to the world and other cultures. New political parties have emerged; social, religious, and spiritual groups have multiplied, points of view have branched off in every possible direction. Québec has become multiethnic.
5. Québec has been on an intensive quest for its identity. This quest has been marked by positive feelings of pride and belonging but also by anxiety about the future. This has bred struggles and tensions.
6. Liberated from traditional values and beliefs, Québécois have been left on their own to manage their lives. Personal development, liberty, immediate pleasure, and experimentation have become the new values of the day.

Consequences for adolescents

- The general spirit of collective controversy tends to predispose youth to act in the same way on an individual level.
- Youth are following suit. They want to decide their own future. They need to feel they are masters of their own existence.
- Youth are now demanding this freedom of thought and expression for themselves, in their personal and social life.
- Youth are exposed to a whole panoply of possibilities concerning their beliefs, their values, their way of life. It is hard for them to find their footing in a social context with so many facets.
- Youth are also on a quest for identity. Their challenge is to construct an identity in a climate where former models seem outmoded and new models are being perpetually constructed.
- Youth are following suit. They are self-centred and preoccupied by their own future. They want to change their own lives, but no longer life in general.

separation and divorce are still traumatizing experiences for youth, especially when either one of the parents chooses a new partner without first analyzing why the first relationship broke up. The adolescent who comes to see just how "imperfect" his parents are will be all the less inclined to identify with them.

Then there is the matter of sexuality. Nothing much is any longer taboo in our days. Everything is expressed, reported, shown, and explained. Youth know more than ever about sexuality. The "free and open" society in which they now evolve persuades them that if they put

off having sex they will be considered weird. Result: they are more than ever, furtively, being made prisoners of their fears and anxieties.

There was a time where adolescence was a brief training period for self-reliance. The passage from childhood to adulthood was then rather linear. You studied (sometimes little, sometimes not at all), you worked, you took economic control of your life. Then, often, you married in order to found a family. Things no longer happen that way today. Because of advanced studies, adolescence, besides having an earlier onset, is prolonged in time. Young

3. Gratton, Francine, *Le climat social du Québec, propice à des suicides d'« être » chez les jeunes?*, P.R.I.S.M.E., Fall 1995, vol. 5, no 4, p.510.



people live much longer with their parents. They are thus financially dependent on their parents longer, and this in no way helps them develop their autonomy.

Given healthy guidelines during this necessary period of experimentation, adolescence can still be an exciting and formative stage in life. In their search for identity, youth can be brought to relate to themselves as a coherent whole maintaining harmonious relations with the environment. However, left to themselves with the illusion that they have total control over everything that happens to them or else repressed in their need for self-assertion and autonomy, youth risk experiencing adolescence as a trip through the desert. There is even the risk of their getting lost in that desert.

Psychological distress, a traumatic event or even some of modern life's curve balls (for example, a heartbreak, the divorce of one's parents): all these may disturb a young person's mental health without giving any grounds to speak of a mental illness with psychiatric diagnosis. Hence, it is important to recognize the subtle signs of distress, so as to respond proactively and refer the troubled youth to a competent professional.

When should we sound the alarm?

Most youth get through adolescence without too much damage and manage to build an adult life in keeping with their aspirations. However, for a thousand and one reasons, a number of young people have a much harder time living out their adolescence. Some even feel quite literally sucked down by the undertow. These youth take many paths on their way down: school drop-out, drugs, depression, eating disorders, suicide.

Youth finally have many ways of letting us know things are not going well. But they must first be heard. Certain signals can be the tip-off allowing adults to detect their teenager's SOS, and take appropriate action.

As a rule, when an adolescent no longer wants to see his friends (the same ones he once couldn't breathe without), when he loses interest in things that were once a passion, and finds everybody "stupid" starting with himself, it's safe to say that this adolescent deserves our concern.

Physical health can also be an important indicator. Too much or not enough sleep, constant fatigue or an eating disorder are telling signs of distress. Sudden hyperactivity, exaggerated or

forced euphoria can also camouflage an underlying state of anxiety. Such symptoms should not necessarily be diagnosed as a mental illness, but rather seen as concrete indications of distress.

However, if any of these symptoms should modify the adolescent's behaviour, mood, emotions, thought patterns, and perception to the point where he has trouble with day-to-day activities, it may be justified to think of them as early signs of some more serious mental illness.

The concerned adult should watch for the intensity, accumulation, and duration of the distress signals. We should keep in mind that adolescence angst is a broad category but can't explain everything. Real and serious symptoms of mental illness are too often and too easily tossed into this category. Knowing how to recognize such symptoms and consult professionals who can diagnose and treat them competently is sometimes the best route to follow.

Remember

Listed below are the traumas that can affect the normal development of youth and disturb their mental health.

- Absence of intergenerational communication.
- Absence of significant others.
- Precocious autonomy or pseudo-autonomy.
- Frequent moves.
- Experience of abuse or violence.
- Experience of prolonged separations (death, divorce, etc.).
- Many foster or institutional placements.
- Family problems.
- Mental health problems in a parent or a member of the immediate family.

General symptoms of mental illness⁴

Categories of symptoms

Examples

Asocial behaviour

- Apathy, withdrawal, drop out from cultural and leisure activities.

Change in behaviour

- Hyperactivity or inactivity, substance abuse, unusual touchiness, recklessness, abnormal posture, drop in personal hygiene and attention to appearance, change in sleeping and eating habits, inability to wash and feed oneself.

Depression

- Serious change in appetite or weight, pessimism, suicidal words or thoughts, lack of interest in activities, extreme fatigue.

Emotional disorders

- Indifference, inappropriate laughter, continuous crying or inability to cry, unusual hostility, inability to express joy, exaggerated fear and distrust.

Thought disorders

- Trouble with concentration and memory, confused thinking, confused speech patterns, absurd remarks, trouble dealing with minor problems, impaired reasoning.

Cognitive and perceptual problems

- Spatio-temporal disorientation, short-term memory problems, inability to wash and feed oneself, inability to resolve everyday problems.

4. *Mental Illness: A Regional Handbook for Families*, AMI-Québec and Project ARC, 1997.

SECONDARY I and II IT'S COOL TO TALK ABOUT IT!

Personal and Social Education Program

Terminal Objective 1

Show that satisfaction of needs helps maintain the proper functioning and full development of an organism.

Terminal Objective 3

Indicate the needs that must be met in order to feel good about oneself.

Activity Objectives

See, through our behaviour, whether we are meeting our needs.

Become aware of strengths within ourselves which contribute to our equilibrium.

Understand that speech is the most powerful tool to end isolation.

Should you observe that some students show signs of serious problems after participating in these exercises, please refer them to the school's psychosocial services and advise these services beforehand.

Learning context

Write the following phrases in a circle on the blackboard: "I often have a lump in my throat", "I have sweaty palms", "I am often tense", "I often have back aches, stomach aches or headaches", "I cry easily", "I am never hungry", "I have trouble sleeping", "I eat excessively".

Write in capital letters, in the centre of the circle, the word STRESS, mixing the letters.

Write in capital letters and in mixed order, at the bottom of the circle, the title of the activity: it cool about talk to it's.

Tell the students that if they can decode the word found in the centre of the circle, they will uncover what all these symptoms are a sign of.

Tell the students that if they can decode the phrase at the bottom of the circle, they will already be on their way to finding a solution to these problems.

Ask the students the following questions:

- Is it possible to imagine that a teenager may be stressed? (like an adult)
- Where does excess stress lead to? (pursue the idea of personal imbalance, mention other possible disorders – solitude, drug use, suicide, violence, etc.).



Question / Problem

Ask the students to define mental health.

Ask the students to explain the link between mental health and the theme.

Try to elicit the following ideas:

- Mental health is a matter of balancing all aspects of our lives: physical, mental, emotional, social, family and school.
- The slogan suggests that, if confronted with personal problems, we must discuss them, even consult.
- Remind students that the expression "he's crazy" is derogatory and can reinforce existing prejudices concerning mental health. It can even result in some individuals not seeking needed help. Seeking help is important not only when we are not feeling well but also at moments when we wish to see things more clearly, to understand what's happening to us.

Underline that the important question these activities will attempt to answer is the following:

How is it possible to maintain one's personal equilibrium or mental health?

Exploration / Discovery

Phase 1

"Talking about what promotes my equilibrium and what hinders it, is cool."

Ask the students to bring various magazines in which they can cut out. Provide large pieces of cardboard and the material needed for a collage.

Explain to the students that they are window-dressers and that they must design two window displays aimed at adolescents. One window must illustrate what can contribute to an adolescent's personal equilibrium. It may feature a product (ball for sports, movie advertising for leisure) or a symbol (heart for love, handshake for friendship).

The second window must show various factors that contribute to stress and threaten a teen's personal equilibrium. It may feature a product (Nintendo, alcohol, money) or a symbol (scenes of violence, pregnancy, divorce of parents).

The collages prepared by the students are hung on the walls of the classroom. Each team explains its project to the group.

Phase 2

"Talking about my emotions is cool."

Remind the students that there are no positive or negative emotions, there are only pleasant and unpleasant emotions. It is the actions associated with these emotions that are positive or negative.

Distribute the following chart and ask the students to put an X in the columns representing what they feel personally. There may be more than one X per emotion.

EMOTIONS	Emotion I often feel and makes me feel good	Emotion I often feel and makes me feel bad	Emotion I can easily detect in other people	Emotion I can not easily detect in other people
ANGER				
AGGRESSIVENESS				
EXCITATION				
FEAR				
GRIEF				
GUILT				
JOY				
LOVE				
PEACE				
PITY				
PLEASURE				
REJECTION				

Once this exercise is completed, ask them to answer the following questions, which are on the same sheet:

- What are the positive aspects in this portrait of your emotions?
- What are the negative aspects in this portrait of your emotions?
- What would you like to improve?
- How will you go about it?

You may ask the students to exchange papers and discuss the results.



Phase 3

“Talking to my inner voice is cool.”

Remind the students of the existence of a little inner voice. At times we have great difficulty silencing this voice and it can be both an ally and a fearsome enemy. This interior monologue is never trivial, it has a direct effect on our self-esteem as well as on our emotions and our level of stress.

To better understand this, let us think about the following inner statements: “I am worthless”; “Nobody loves me”; “Everybody hates me”; “I’ll never amount to anything”. Imagine the impact of this voice if these statements have been repeated for 10 years. Yet, the little voice could also be saying “You are nice”, “You are good”, “You can do it”. Impossible to hide from it, this voice follows us everywhere... We might as well attempt to tame it, take control of our little inner voice, rather than allow it to cripple us with unkind words.

Ask students to change the inner dialogue for each of the following situations:

1. A girl asks a boy to dance. He thinks to himself:
She only wants to make fun of me and make me look stupid.
2. A girl shows her father a report card that is not very good. She thinks to herself:
If I start by telling him off, maybe he’ll leave me alone.
3. John must begin a complicated math homework assignment. He thinks to himself:
I might as well not do it, I won’t understand anything anyway.
4. Julie receives praise from her teacher for raising her average from 50% to 60%. She thinks to herself:
What a hypocrite, she knows that I am not good. She only congratulated me so I will keep quiet in class.
5. Jennifer teases Robert because of his acne. He thinks to himself:
I know that I’m ugly! All the girls feel the same about me.

Complete this exercise by asking the students to share some of the positive inner thoughts they found for each situation.

Encourage students to become aware of their inner dialogue and avoid:

- expressions that generalize (always, never, everyone, nobody);
- negative expressions (not good, not able, not attractive, not nice).

Encourage them to use kinder words (I am nice, I am intelligent, I am attractive and capable).

Resources for Youth :

Pavillon Foster Youth Services (514) 486-1304
(Alcohol and drug rehabilitation center)

Suicide-Action Montreal (514) 723-4000
(Hot line)

Tel-Jeunes (514) 288-2266
(Hot line for teens) 1-800-263-2266

Phase 4

Summarize and provide an organized answer to the main question.

One of the key elements in maintaining mental equilibrium is, without doubt, a healthy lifestyle. Needless to say that mental health is nourished by physical activity, sound eating habits, restful sleep, social activities and interesting hobbies.



Nevertheless, everyday events, life’s trials and tribulations, and unfortunate incidents continue to threaten us. Although we may have a healthy lifestyle, we may not necessarily possess all of the skills needed to deal with these situations. It is therefore useful to develop and to cultivate these skills, for example: the ability to manage stress and emotions, to solve problems, to develop self-esteem, self-confidence and self-affirmation, to communicate with others, and to seek social support.

Despite all of these protective factors, coping with a difficult situation such as a death or dealing with abuse may prove impossible. It is important to remind youth that they can always find a trustworthy person to listen to them and appropriate professional help to guide them towards a solution. The important thing is to rediscover happiness. Unhappiness can kill bit by bit or in a flash, without discrimination.

• SYNTHESIS •

Put the students in teams of two. Ask them to list all of the people in their school and within their community who can help them maintain their personal equilibrium, and to explain how these people can help.



SECONDARY **III** **IV** & **V**

IT'S COOL TO TALK ABOUT IT!

Personal and Social Education Program

Terminal Objective 1

Briefly describe the problems associated with maintaining health.

Terminal Objective 4

Illustrate the importance of maintaining harmonious relations with one's environment.

Activity Objectives

Identify those living habits which promote personal equilibrium.

Become aware of strengths within ourselves which contribute to our equilibrium.

Understand that speech is the most powerful tool to end isolation.

Learning context

Ask the students to answer the questionnaire "Feeling Good About Yourself, or Not?". Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers, as this is only a thought-provoking activity. An untrue answer would only cheat themselves. Assure them that this questionnaire will remain their personal property unless they wish to share it with you.

Note : This is not a standardized test and thus has not been validated. It is very important to qualify the results.

Feeling good about yourself, or not?

Here's a little quiz to give you some idea of your personal well-being, tips to help you deal with various situations, and a tool to help start a dialogue with others. You'll discover things about your body image, your love life, your family relationships, your group experiences and your academic world. Do not attempt to find the correct answers; there are no correct or incorrect answers. Answer based on what you really feel and believe.

	Always	Usually	Rarely	Never
1	10	5	2	0
2	0	2	5	10
3	0	2	5	10
4	10	5	2	0
5	0	2	5	10
6	0	2	5	10
7	10	5	2	0
8	0	2	5	10
9	0	2	5	10
10	10	5	2	0
11	10	5	2	0
12	0	2	5	10
13	0	2	5	10
14	0	2	5	10
15	10	5	2	0
16	0	2	5	10
17	10	5	2	0
18	0	2	5	10
19	10	5	2	0
20	0	2	5	10
21	10	5	2	0
22	0	2	5	10
23	10	5	2	0
24	10	5	2	0
25	0	2	5	10
26	0	2	5	10
27	10	5	2	0
28	10	5	2	0
29	10	5	2	0
30	0	2	5	10
31	10	5	2	0
32	0	2	5	10
33	10	5	2	0
34	0	2	5	10
35	10	5	2	0
36	0	2	5	10
37	10	5	2	0
38	10	5	2	0
39	10	5	2	0
40	0	2	5	10

Check the box that truly corresponds to what you think and feel.

- 1 I find that I am physically well-proportioned.
- 2 I have trouble falling asleep the night before an exam.
- 3 My parents don't help me with school work.
- 4 I have many friends who support me.
- 5 Peers of the opposite sex find me ugly.
- 6 I find that I am too fat or too thin.
- 7 I could easily find someone (boy or girl) who would want to go out with me.
- 8 I often find myself alone at school without anyone to talk to.
- 9 There is constant fighting in my home and it bothers me.
- 10 I am able to stand up for myself in front of others.
- 11 I believe that a romantic relationship can help me grow.
- 12 I feel insecure when I am with others.
- 13 I have a serious physical flaw and it bothers me a lot.
- 14 Teachers are always on my back.
- 15 I communicate well with at least one of my parents.
- 16 I feel embarrassed when a person of the opposite sex looks at me.
- 17 There is at least one adult at school in whom I could confide.
- 18 I have pimples on my face and it bothers me a lot.
- 19 My parents are always there to encourage me when I participate in activities.
- 20 I am no good at school and am considering quitting.
- 21 My home life is calm and I can easily relax.
- 22 I don't think I will ever find love.
- 23 When I give an oral presentation, I feel very comfortable.
- 24 I am able to appreciate myself when I look in the mirror.
- 25 I am too mature for the other kids and prefer to remain alone.
- 26 I am afraid of sex. Just thinking of being touched makes me sweat.
- 27 I always hand in my assignments on time.
- 28 I think nothing of giving my friends a photo of myself.
- 29 We have family activities that I enjoy a lot.
- 30 I am affected by what others think of me.
- 31 I communicate well with others.
- 32 I am worried about my sexual orientation.
- 33 I am very good at sports.
- 34 I do not have enough money to participate in the same leisure activities as the others.
- 35 When I go to parties, I am comfortable with people of both sexes.
- 36 No matter what I do, I am sure to be criticized by my parents.
- 37 I participate in many school activities.
- 38 I rarely have conflicts with my friends.
- 39 People of the opposite sex think I am an interesting person.
- 40 My parents are not interested in me and say hurtful things to me.

How to interpret your test "Feeling good about yourself, or not?"

Once the quiz is completed, you can analyse your results in two ways. First, add up your points for each statement. This will give you a general idea of your well-being. Second, you can interpret your results according to five major areas by grouping your answers according to the following categories.

Score interpretation :

400-301 total marks or 80-61 for analysis by categories

You're doing great! Health is your thing and you seem to have the hang of it. But, be wary if you encounter any problems, the fall may be hard on you. If this happens, don't hesitate to seek help.

300-201 total marks or 60-41 for analysis by categories

Great balancing! There are a few clouds, but nothing serious. In any event, you can handle it. Continue to exert control over the events that affect you — it's the best way to stay healthy.

200-101 total marks or 40-21 for analysis by categories

Small problems can become big problems if we are not vigilant. Be more aware of events affecting you, some attitude and behaviour modification might not hurt. If you feel overwhelmed, talk it over with someone.

100-0 total marks or 20-0 for analysis by categories

Major disappointments on the horizon? Already feeling depressed? Your results should encourage you to meet with an adult you can trust! Together, you could analyze your answers and try to find solutions.

Categories	Statements
Body image :	1-6-13-18-24-28-32-33
Academic life :	2-8-14-17-20-23-27-37
Family life :	3-9-15-19-21-29-36-40
Social life :	4-10-12-25-30-31-34-38
Love life :	5-7-11-16-22-26-35-39

Remind them that the important question that these activities will attempt to answer is the following:

How is it possible to maintain personal equilibrium or mental health?

Exploration / Discovery

Phase 1

"Talking to my inner voice is cool."

Remind the students of the existence of a little inner voice. At times we have great difficulty silencing this voice and it can be both an ally and a fearsome enemy. This interior monologue is never trivial, it has a direct effect on our self-esteem but also on our emotions and our level of stress.

To better understand this, let us think about the following inner statements: "I am worthless"; "Nobody loves me"; "Everybody hates me"; "I'll never amount to anything". Imagine the impact of this voice if these statements have been repeated for 10 years. Yet, the little voice could also be saying "You are nice", "You are good", "You can do it". Impossible to hide from it, this voice follows us everywhere... We might as well attempt to tame it, to take control of this little inner voice, rather than allow it to cripple us with unkind words.

Ask the students to form teams of two. Give them ten learning contexts. For each situation, one of the team members begins by writing a negative inner discussion, which he reads to the other team member who, in turn, corrects it with a positive inner dialogue. After 5 learning contexts, the team members switch roles.

Learning context

A girl invites a boy to dance. He thinks to himself:

Brian goes to his first job interview. Once in the boss' office, he thinks to himself:

Julie tries on a sexy sweater in a store. While looking at herself in the mirror, she thinks to herself:

Marc is confronted with a difficult math problem. He thinks to himself:

Sandra made a blunder and goes to talk it over with her parents. While facing them, she thinks to herself:

Chuck's father is scolding him because he damaged his car yesterday. He thinks to himself, while his father scolds him:

Eric's teacher accuses him of lack of effort in front of the entire class. Eric thinks to himself:

Louise teases Jack because of his acne. Jack thinks to himself:

Question / Problem

Write the title of the activity on the blackboard: "It's cool to talk about it."

Ask the students to establish a link between the theme and the quiz.

Ask the students to define mental health.

Ask the students to establish a link between the theme and mental health.

Bring out the following ideas:

- The quiz highlights their level of well-being. If they are preoccupied with certain problems, rather than brood over them, why not seek out someone (friend or adult they can trust) with whom to talk it over. Emphasize that the quiz covers the factors that help maintain mental health and those that jeopardize it and that, while seeking out the former, one should try to avoid the latter.

Present the negative elements of the quiz as being problems which can be solved.

- Mental health is a matter of establishing a balance between all aspects of your life: physical, mental, emotional, social, family, and school.



- The slogan suggests that if we are confronted with personal problems, we must talk about them, even consult.
- Remind students that the expression "he's crazy" is derogatory and can reinforce existing prejudices concerning mental health. It can even result in some individuals not seeking needed help. Seeking help is important not only when we are not feeling well but also at moments when we wish to see things more clearly, to understand what's happening to us.

The cutest guy in class asks Caroline to go to the prom with him. Caroline thinks to herself:

Susan strolls down the hallway and sees a gang of people who seem to be laughing at her. She thinks to herself:

Ask each team to choose its best two dialogues and present them to the class.

Phase 2

“It’s cool to talk about it!”

1st option

Ask the students to:

Exchange their “Feeling good about yourself or not?” quiz with another student whom they trust, and to discuss it amongst themselves. The students may use the following questions as a guide.

- What do you think about your results?
- Are there things that the test brought out that you would like to change?
- How do you think you’ll go about it?
- Are there any interesting strengths?
- The quiz refers to romantic relationships. Do you believe in love? In couples?
- Are you satisfied with your friendships? Your social life? Your family?
- Is school a place where you can grow?
- What is your opinion of the image you project? Difficult or easy to live with?

2nd option

For those students who do not wish to participate in this activity, offer them as an alternative a self-analysis using the following questions which deal with the ability to talk about oneself.

- If there is no one in the class that you can trust, is there anyone, outside the classroom? Can you name these people?
- Which aspect of yourself do you most enjoy talking about?
- What aspect of your life do you not like discussing?
- Why is it important to have someone to confide in?
- Are you a person one can confide in? Explain.
- Have you ever had a particularly interesting experience where someone confided in you? What was it about? How did you feel?
- Have you ever had a disappointing experience where someone betrayed your trust? What was it about? How did you feel?
- If you had a serious personal problem, would you consult a health professional? Explain your answer.
- What do you think can happen to a person who goes through life always isolated from others?
- Do you believe in friendship? How do you perceive it?
- Do you believe in living as a couple? How do you perceive this?

Phase 3

Next, ask the students to answer the following questions individually. This is a short questionnaire aimed at taking an objective look at group interaction.

- Which alternative did you choose for the group discussion? Why?

- How did it go between you?
- How did you feel?
- Do you think that this discussion was worthwhile?
- What positive aspects did you retain from this discussion?

Phase 4

Summarize and provide an organized answer to the main question.

(Please refer to the activities in the secondary I section, phase 4 on page 3.)

• SYNTHESIS •

Divide the students into groups of four. Have them use the school or municipal library or the Internet to find documentation on stress management techniques. Each team must return to class with at least two techniques that they will try out on the rest of the class (visualization, breathing techniques, relaxation exercises, etc.). The teacher may also participate. Literature on this subject is extensive.

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