

Activity Guide: Mental Health Communication Observation

Activity Goal:

- Draw students' attention to how, and how often, mental health is mentioned by their friends and family, media, and generally society.
- Encourage students to analyze the mental health messages that surround them in their daily lives.

Estimated Time for Students to Complete: 1 day of general observations, approx. 45 minutes of critical thinking/active writing

Activity Instructions:

1. Give each student a printout of the Activity Handout (2 pages, can print front-and-back).
2. Ask students to carry the sheet with them for one full day and use it to record every instance in which mental health, mental health conditions, or serious mental illness is brought up (including social media posts, in-class conversations, discussion with friends, advertisements, etc.).
3. After recording a full day's worth of references, either a) facilitate small-group, in-class discussions, or b) assign a short reflection essay that asks students to review their list and address the following questions:
 - Which message on your list resonated with/struck you/stirred you the noteworthy, and why? For example, it was in a surprising location, from an unexpected source, or was unusually frank.
 - Looking at your list, do you see any patterns in the location, source, or tone of the messages you observed?
 - Were you surprised at how often or how rarely mental health came up throughout your day? Why or why not?
 - Which messages did you feel were person-centered and de-stigmatizing, meaning they focused on the person instead of their mental health or painted mental health in a positive way? Why?
 - Which messages did you feel were negative, inaccurate, unfair, or stigmatizing? Why?
 - Did paying closer attention to mental health-related messages for a day make you re-think how YOU communicate about mental health? Why or why not?
4. For further context or to continue the conversation, see the following additional resources:
 - Mental Health America (mhanational.org): An advocacy group that provides education, tools for mental health promotion, updates on public policy, and ways to get involved
 - National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI; nami.org): This well-established organization offers video resources, online discussion groups, resources for loved ones, information on current research, and more
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 (TALK)

Activity Handouts (2 pages)

Instructions: For one full day, pay close attention to advertisements, news stories or social media posts, and conversations (yours and those you overhear). Keep track of every time you hear or see something that refers to mental health, mental health conditions, or serious mental illness, including references to screenings, symptoms, treatments, related products, or just general attitudes and/or opinions about mental health. Two examples have been filled in to get you started.

Time of Day (appx)	Location of Message	Type of message (i.e. "billboard," "conversation with friends)	Summary of Message	Tone of the message (inclusive or stigmatizing? Positive or negative?)	Notes (Anything you find noteworthy or unique about this message)
9:30 a.m.	Commercial during podcast	Audio commercial	A PSA-type message asking people to watch for signs of depression, and encouraging them to get screened for mental health problems	Serious, educational	I almost didn't catch this, because I tend to tune-out to podcast ads. If I weren't specifically listening for these types of messages, I wouldn't have paid attention.
10 a.m.	In class	Verbal message from a friend	She told me I was acting "crazy" because I was nervous about a test.	Joking, light-hearted	My friend says "crazy" all the time.

Time of Day (appx)	Location of Message	Type of message (i.e. "billboard," "conversation with friends)	Summary of Message	Tone of the message (inclusive or stigmatizing? Positive or negative?)	Notes (Anything you find noteworthy or unique about this message)