



Mental Health Unit Plan



Introduction and Framework

Introduction to the Unit

YVC affiliates implement in-school programming in different ways. This unit plan is a guide and will require modification due to variations in meeting frequency, duration, specific school requirements, etc. Activities for this unit plan are based on a once-per-week meeting frequency. **All activities, including icebreakers, service-learning lessons, assessments, and objectives are flexible and should be modified for specific youth needs or program desires.** More service-learning activities related to mental health can be found in [YVC's Service-Learning Library](#). Further in-depth research and information regarding working with youth and mental health can be found on YVC's [Working with Youth](#) page.

This unit plan contains 6 weeks of activities focused on mental health. Prior knowledge amongst youth will vary. This unit is written for middle or high school students.

Although this unit emphasizes an introduction to mental health, youth will also have opportunities to explore other disciplines including public speaking, writing, analyzing, advocacy, and critical thinking.

Instructional Design and Framework

- Week 1: What is Mental Health?
- Week 2: Mental Health Myth Vs. Fact
- Week 3: Mental Health: Prevalence and Prevention
- Week 4: How to Help- ALGEE
- Week 5: Volunteering and Mental Health
- Week 6: A Mascot for Mental Health

Meaningful Service

As each affiliate, school club, or class has different needs, assets, partnerships, and budget, physical service projects are not built into this unit plan. Integrate meaningful service into the instructional design and framework in a way that makes sense for your context. Consider the full volunteer spectrum (direct/indirect service, fundraising/financial planning, advocacy, community education) when planning projects. Remember that along with following all 8 program standards, it is imperative for each project to align with all elements of a true YVC project: icebreaker, meaningful service, service-learning, and reflection. It is acceptable to spread out elements of the YVC model as long as the same group of students is being engaged in all elements over the period. YVHQ recommends you determine a period of time for each unit or issue area content section and ensure that all elements of the YVC model are present sometime during that period, sprinkling in elements of icebreakers, meaningful service, service-learning, and reflection throughout. Projects should always benefit the community.

Unit Goals

- Youth will define "mental health."
- Youth will explore prevention methods for mental illness.
- Youth will examine common misconceptions related to mental illness.
- Youth will have a more well-rounded understanding of how to take care of their own mental health and how to help those around them.

Unit Objectives

- Youth will familiarize themselves with the language of “mental health” by reviewing common definitions and distinctions between wellness and illness.
- Youth will discuss the importance of and strategies for including mental health in overall health.
- You will create a shared definition of “mental wellness”.
- Youth will distinguish myths from facts related to mental illness by the end of the activity.
- During the lesson, youth will evaluate information they read about mental illness.
- By completing the attached worksheet, youth will recognize the frequency of mental health disorders in the United States.
- Youth will discuss the importance of prevention by reviewing the spectrum of mental health intervention.
- Youth will demonstrate knowledge of prevention strategies by creating an infomercial-style skit promoting prevention and intervention strategies for youth.
- During the lesson, youth will discuss the 5 steps in the MHFA[®] action plan as outlined in the mnemonic (memory device): ALGEE
- Using role play, youth will demonstrate understanding of the action plan steps by acting out each step for the group.
- At the end of this lesson, youth will recall several ways that volunteering improves mental health after participating in a discussion.
- At the end of this discussion, youth will demonstrate their critical thinking skills when it comes to reading facts and research about mental health.
- During the lesson, youth will review facts about common mental health disorders and issues.
- During the lesson, youth will design a mascot character that represents an issue of their choice.
- To conclude the lesson, youth will present their mascot design to the group.

National Education Standards Addressed

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.5 Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

Assessment

Youth will participate in a summative assessment at the end of the unit.



Week 1: What is Mental Health?

Introduction

- Greet and if necessary, introduce yourself to youth. Remind youth of the mission and purpose of Youth Volunteer Corps and if necessary, share with them what activities they will participate in while being involved in YVC.

Icebreaker: About Me Charades

- Ask each youth volunteer to act out 2-3 things about them while the group guesses.
Adaptation: If someone in your group is visually impaired, have youth verbally describe their personal facts without using the key word they are describing (as in Catch Phrase or Taboo games).

Youth Leadership: Group Agreements

- Have a conversation with youth about how they will be exploring mental health over the next few weeks. Given the potentially personal or difficult conversations that may occur, ask youth to create a [group agreement](#) about how they would like to interact respectfully and effectively.

What is Mental Health?

- Engage youth in the [What is Mental Health](#) activity. This activity includes service-learning and reflection elements.

Follow Up

- Ask youth to write down any questions about mental health that they would like to have answered during this unit. Do your best to provide youth with answers or resources.



Week 2: Mental Health Myth Vs. Fact

Introduction: Building off of knowledge gained in week 1, youth will participate in activities designed to analyze common mental health misconceptions.

Icebreaker: Two Truths and a Lie

- One by one, each person says their name and two truths and one lie about themselves. The rest of the group guesses which one is the lie.

Week One Recap:

- Delegate a youth volunteer to summarize the previous week's activity and findings (what is mental health).
- Ask for a volunteer to remind the group of the Group Agreement that they decided upon the prior week.

Mental Health Myth Vs. Fact Activity

- Engage youth in the [Mental Health Myth vs. Fact](#) activity. This activity includes service-learning and reflection elements.

Next Steps

- Remind youth of their shared definition of "mental wellness."

Youth Voice

- If desired, ask youth to volunteer to lead the group in a mental wellness exercise (breathing, affirmations, stretching, journaling, etc).



Week 3: Mental Health Prevalence and Prevention

Introduction: Youth will review commonly experienced mental health problems and discuss their frequency. Youth will also explore different mental health interventions and prevention strategies.

Icebreaker: Initial Fame

- Each person says their first and last name, and tries to name a famous person with the same initials. Other group members can help if needed.

Week Two Recap:

- Ask youth if they've been able to recognize or identify mental health misconceptions in their day-to-day lives (in public, on TV, on social media, etc.) since your last meeting.
- Ask for a volunteer to remind the group of the Group Agreement that they decided upon for the unit.

Mental Health Prevalence and Prevention Activity

- Engage youth in the [Mental Health Prevalence and Prevention](#) activity. This activity includes service-learning and reflection elements.

Youth Leadership

- Ask youth to work as a group to brainstorm ways they can promote mental wellness in their community/school. What steps do they need to take to make this happen? Help youth make a plan and implement.



Week 4: How to Help- ALGEE

Introduction: Youth will learn the Mental Health First Aid® (MHFA) Action Plan steps and practice actions using role play.

Icebreaker: Ten Fingers

- Everyone holds up all ten fingers. One at a time, everyone says their name and something that they've never done (i.e. never been to California, never had lobster, never volunteered before, etc.) If someone in the circle has done the stated activity, they put a finger down. Take turns going around the circle as long as time allows/until there is one person left with fingers up.

Week Three Recap:

- Delegate a youth volunteer to summarize the previous week's activity.
- Ask for a volunteer to remind the group of the Group Agreement that they decided upon for the unit.

How to Help-ALGEE Activity:

- Engage youth in the [How to Help- ALGEE](#) activity. This activity includes service-learning and reflection elements.

Additional Reflection

- Give youth time to choose one or more of the following journal prompts to respond to. Share with the group that this is for their personal reflection and their answers will not be shared with the group unless they choose to share.
 - What have you learned about mental health so far during this unit? What questions do you still have?
 - Do you know someone who struggles with a mental illness? If so, what can you do to support them? Do you struggle with a mental illness? If so, what can others do to support you?
 - What is something you once thought about mental illness that has changed over the last few weeks?
 - Why do you think mental illness is so prevalent in our society? What would you change about our society to aid those living with mental illness?

Youth Voice

- Ask if any youth would like to share their reflections with the group. Remind youth that this is not required.



Week 5: Volunteering and Mental Health

Introduction: Youth will learn about how volunteering can boost mental wellness and discuss their own experiences with volunteering.

Icebreaker: The Magic Wand

- We just found an imaginary magic wand that allows us to change things. Pass the “wand” around and ask each youth to share their name and what two things they would change about a certain topic. Topics can be anything from themselves to the current project to their school or siblings.

Week Four Recap:

- As a group, review ALGEE from last week’s activity.
- Ask for a volunteer to remind the group of the Group Agreement that they decided upon for the unit.

Volunteering and Mental Health Activity:

- Today, you will be discussing how volunteering benefits mental health. Remind youth of the purpose and mission of YVC, focusing on service to the community.
- Engage youth in the [Volunteering and Mental Health](#) activity. This activity includes service-learning and reflection elements.

Youth Voice

- Refer to the brainstorming list youth created in week 3. Have a discussion on progress on these ideas and goals and make a plan to continue implementation.
- If desired, ask youth to volunteer to lead the group in a mental wellness exercise (breathing, affirmations, stretching, journaling, etc.).



Week 6: A Mascot for Mental Health

Introduction: In this final week of the unit, youth will create their own “mascot for mental health” and identify an issue of focus for their mascot to promote.

Icebreaker: Highs and Lows

- Starting with yourself as an example, give a high and low of your day or week. Ask others to share as they are willing or popcorn from person to person. Example: My high today was going on a walk with my dog, and my low was not seeing my friends.

Unit Recap:

- Ask for volunteers to give a recap of the unit. As a group, do a quick run-through of the activities that youth participated in.

A Mascot for Mental Health Activity:

- Engage youth in the [Mascot for Mental Health](#) activity. This activity includes service-learning and reflection elements.

Follow Up:

- Review the questions that youth asked in week one to ensure all questions have been answered.

Final Reflection:

- How does mental wellness affect a community?
- What is something you once thought about mental illness that has changed over the last few weeks?
- Draw or write what you will do to take care of your own mental health.

Administer the Final Assessment



Mental Health Unit Assessment

Name: _____

1. Using at least 4 sentences, write a paragraph describing what you have learned about mental health.

2. List at least 3 examples of mental health prevention.

3. What does ALGEE stand for?

A _____
L _____
G _____
E _____
E _____

4. Define "mental health."

5. T/F Youth don't struggle with mental health issues. Only adults.
6. T/F Your personality or ability to handle your feelings does not cause mental illness.
7. T/F When people have mental illnesses, they will never get better.
8. T/F People diagnosed with mental illnesses can get better. Every illness is different. Some people feel better when they talk to someone, like a friend or a doctor, or take medication.