

# changing minds



## DISCUSSION GUIDE



*#MentalHealthStories*

# ABOUT CHANGING MINDS

**EVEN IF THERE** were twice as many real mental health stories being told, it still wouldn't be enough. That's why we – Community Access – launched Changing Minds, a unique storytelling initiative that helps young people (ages 15 to 25) share their mental health stories in ways that can spark meaningful conversation and bring about real change.

Particularly through sharing and discussing short films about mental health, made by young filmmakers, Changing Minds aims to positively change how we think and talk about mental health issues. For young people, especially, mental health challenges can be difficult to navigate – and too many face these challenges alone, fearful of being misunderstood and marginalized. This can change. This should change. With students, educators, and mental health advocates all working together, we can help young people to feel free, safe, healthy, and hopeful.

# STIGMA AFFECTS ALL ASPECTS OF WELLNESS

**IT'S OFTEN TRUE** that we don't talk about mental health enough – and that many of the conversations we do have are inhibited by mistrust, misunderstanding, and a general sense of unease. Even among close friends and family members, mental health stigma can prevent open, nonjudgmental, and empathetic dialogue.

While this state of affairs may be familiar, its far-reaching impact on our lives can be difficult to appreciate fully. Our failure to discuss mental health in constructive ways comes with many costs – and, left unaddressed, these costs only compound over time, with consequences felt at every level of our society.

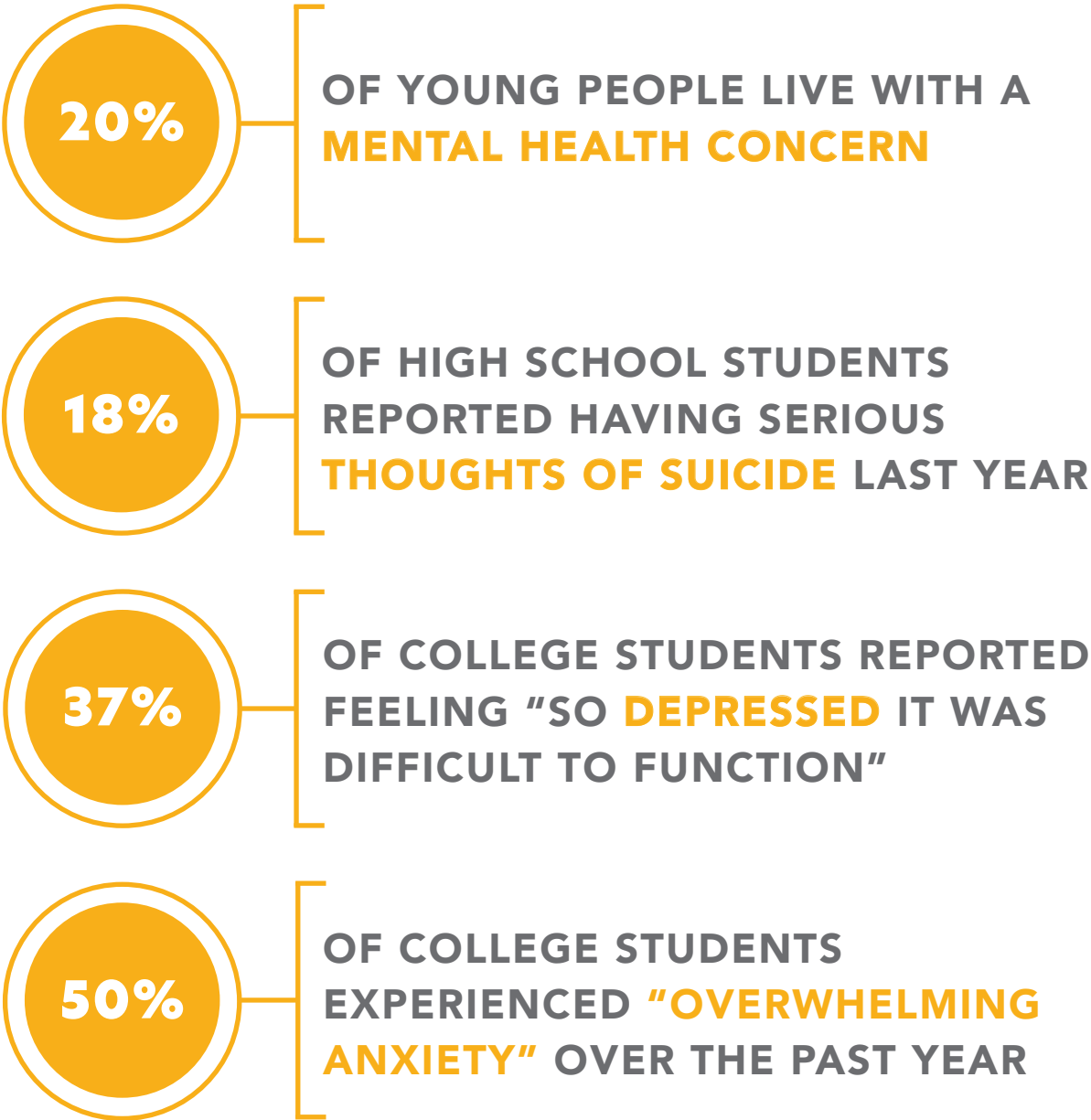


The World Health Organization has defined wellness as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” There are eight dimensions of wellness: emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, and spiritual. Mental health stigma hinders our ability to pursue opportunities across each of these dimensions. For young people – who are still establishing their identities and place in the world – this unnecessary roadblock can be especially damaging.

We can't put mental health in a box and move it aside; mental health *is* health. By helping young people “change minds,” we can change lives for the better.

# YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH: IN FOCUS

**MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES** often begin very early in life. Half of all lifetime cases begin by age 14, and three-quarters by age 24. Too often, there are not enough resources available to help young people and their families get the support they need – and depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, eating disorders, and other mental health struggles remain all too prevalent. Consider the following:



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

We hope these films will produce open and productive conversations, and suggest the following list of questions to discuss after watching the films. The questions are split into three sections: Reflect, Generalize, and Apply. This method allows for audience members to collaboratively connect personal experience to real world applications and action.

**Reflect:** Let's start by thinking and talking about the films we just watched, and how they made us feel.

- ▶ What are your general reactions to the films? What kind of emotions and thoughts were you feeling and thinking throughout watching the films?
- ▶ Did any of the films stick out to you more than others? Why?
- ▶ Did any of the films make you look at mental health differently?
- ▶ Did you make any connections between the films and something in your or a friend/family member's life?

**Generalize:** These next questions focus on broader connections between the films and the world.

- ▶ Why do you think there is a stigma around mental health? Who does this stigma affect?
- ▶ How does the media play a role in the perception of mental health? Is it positive or negative?
- ▶ How can stigma be challenged? Do you think art can be effective in doing so?
- ▶ What kind of support exists for young people struggling with mental health concerns? Who are these resources available to?

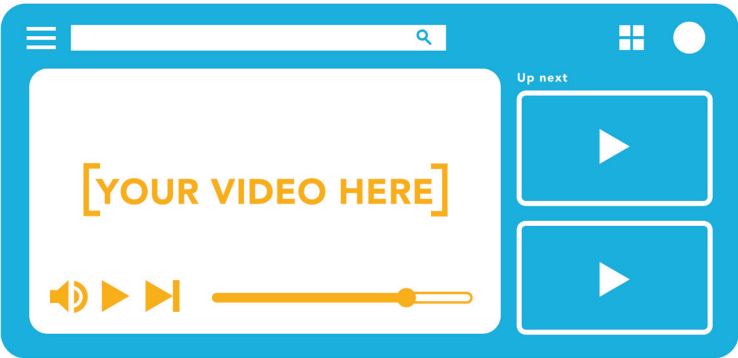
**Apply:** Finally, let's think about ways we can make change, whether that be on the family, community, city, or global level! Remember: No change is too small, and the simplest action can make difference!

- ▶ What are things that young people can do to help break the stigma around mental health?
- ▶ What are things our community leaders can change to help fight mental health stigma and increase access to care?

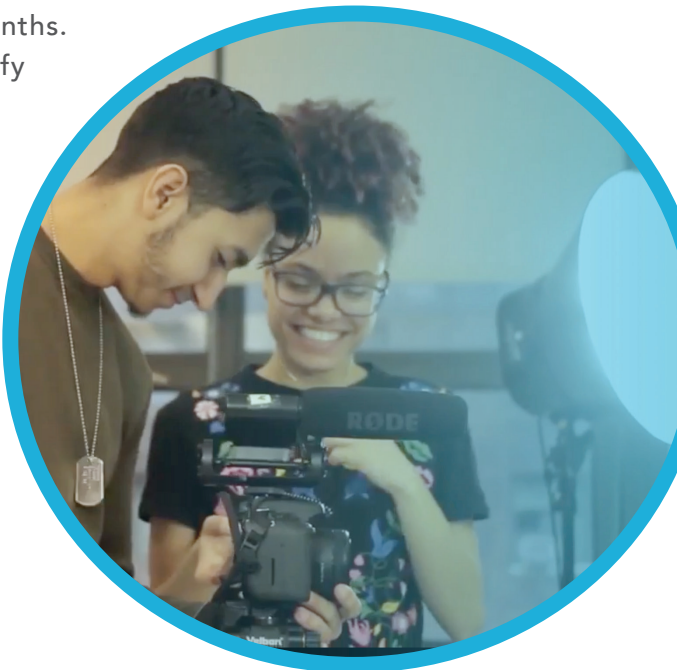
# SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Changing Minds conversations can go in many different directions – hopefully always in ways that are friendly, authentic, and honest. If you'd like to also take things in a more active direction, we recommend the following exercises:

- ▶ Ask everyone to imagine making their own short film about mental health issues. What kind of story would you tell – and how?



- ▶ Check out the Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Festival online ([www.communityaccess.org/changingminds](http://www.communityaccess.org/changingminds)) and see if this is a good opportunity to bring these stories to life!
- ▶ Ask everyone to share mental health stories in other creative ways – online (e.g. blog posts, Instagram, etc.) and offline (e.g. short stories, poetry, painting, etc.). Ask everyone to consider the implications, strengths, and weaknesses of sharing stories in these different ways.
- ▶ May and October are Mental Health Awareness Months. Use these opportunities to ask everyone to identify five steps they can take to reduce mental health stigma in their classroom, their school, and their community – and check their progress as they take those steps!
- ▶ Join the conversation! Use our **#ChangingMinds** and **#MentalHealthStories** hashtags to connect with other young people doing the important work of improving mental health in schools.
- ▶ Ask everyone to recommend a website, book, TV show, or film that positively addresses mental health issues – and to explain the thinking behind this recommendation.



## ABOUT COMMUNITY ACCESS

**FOUNDED IN 1974**, Community Access is a pioneer of supportive housing and social services in NYC for people with mental health concerns. A big part of our work involves advocacy – breaking down barriers and rallying our community to promote human rights, social justice, and economic opportunities for all. Our signature advocacy event is the NYC Mental Health Film Festival, which has attracted more than 5,000 audience members and screened 60+ films since 2005.

The Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Competition was launched in connection to our NYC Mental Health Film Festival in 2015 – growing year-on-year to become what it is today, a Young Filmmaker Festival, and a larger and multifaceted mental health initiative.

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*I wanted to give a voice to teens trying to figure out their own identities in a world that wants to box them in and label them.*

*- Daphne Parkhill*



## WHAT ARE YOU THINKING... FEELING... DREAMING?

Enter the Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Competition to share your uplifting/unique/unprecedented/out-of-the-ordinary/vital mental health story *through film*.

Why? Because even if there were **twice** as many real mental health stories being told, it still wouldn't be enough. So: Lead the conversation. Fight stigma. Change some minds. Plus, *winning films* will be screened at the Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Festival.

## WHO WE ARE

Changing Minds grew out of the NYC Mental Health Film Festival, which is – well – kind of a big deal. We screen films from all over the world, and major filmmaking talents and mental health advocates join us to share their stories too. (♥ Demi Lovato, Tasha Smith, Chamique Holdsclaw, John Turturro....) We're online at [www.mentalhealthfilmfest.nyc](http://www.mentalhealthfilmfest.nyc).

## WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR

Our Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Competition is for filmmakers aged between 15 and 25. To qualify, films must be 10 minutes or shorter – and check this box:



*Focus on mental health issues (depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, OCD, BPD, etc.) affecting young people*

...And at least one of these:

- ☐ *Promote social justice + human rights*
- ☐ *Combat stereotypes, untruths, and half-truths*
- ☐ *Convey a message of hope*
- ☐ *Inspire conversation + new ways of thinking*

We hope most of all that you'll share a story that is *authentic*, with courage and conviction.

P.S. (And we mean this in the nicest possible way...) Don't be boring.

## HOW TO ENTER

Easy as eating pancakes.

Visit [www.communityaccess.org/changingminds](http://www.communityaccess.org/changingminds) for more info + submission guidelines.



**YOUNG FILMMAKER  
COMPETITION**

**YOUNG FILMMAKER  
FESTIVAL**

## **PARTNERS**

- ▶ *The Born This Way Foundation*
- ▶ *Isora Foundation*
- ▶ *Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund*
- ▶ *LPZ Cinetech*
- ▶ *Reel Abilities*
- ▶ *Queens Library*
- ▶ *Singapore Mental Health Film Festival*
- ▶ *The Youth Mental Health Project*

**[www.communityaccess.org/changingminds](http://www.communityaccess.org/changingminds)**



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