

Dealing with Stigma/Empowerment

Goals: Education on stigma; increase emotional expression; increase sense of self-worth/empowerment

Therapeutic Revolution: This lesson plan is education based, but allows for open discussion and emotional expression. The session begins with a discussion on, “What is stigma?” Residents are encouraged to discuss their own understanding of stigma, and are then presented with a dictionary’s definition. After providing the residents a copy of the lyric to the song “Unwell” by Matchbox Twenty (first page), the song is played:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StFfXP4eAgU&list=RDEmKE3f7QldpufcuCjRZ4LXCQ&start_radio=1. [A video that includes only the lyric is recommended in order to encourage the residents to focus on the lyrics rather than the official video].

After listening to the song, the residents are encouraged analysis the lyrics. This song features vivid descriptions of various mental health symptoms, including visual and auditory hallucinations, anxiety, depression, delusions, insomnia, and more. The lyric analysis for this song pairs with an educational resource from National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) titled “9 Ways to Fight Mental Health Stigma” (second page). The second page can be replaced with the creator of this lesson plan, Erin Seibert’s handout titled “Empowering Yourself against Stigma:”

<https://musictherapytime.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/steps-towards-empowerment.pdf>

Considerations: It is important to keep in mind that stigma can be an abstract concept to discuss when considering this lesson plan for your group. As these discussions can often lead to off-topic but related conversations, attempt to stay strong with the intentions behind this lesson and always come back to the music.

Takeaway: Patients often face stigma even within the hospital setting. This lesson plan can be helpful when addressing frustrating with hospitalization itself in order to better support the patients and to help give them a voice. A helpful discussion of the importance in advocating for yourself can ultimately lead back to the importance of educating oneself about their mental health.

Unwell by Matchbox Twenty

All day staring at the ceiling
Making friends with shadows on my wall
All night hearing voices telling me
That I should get some sleep
Because tomorrow might be good for
something

Hold on
Feeling like I'm headed for a breakdown
And I don't know why

But I'm not crazy, I'm just a little unwell
I know right now you can't tell
But stay awhile and maybe then you'll
see
A different side of me
I'm not crazy, I'm just a little impaired
I know right now you don't care
But soon enough you're gonna think of
me
And how I used to be...me

I'm talking to myself in public
Dodging glances on the train
And I know, I know they've all been
talking about me
I can hear them whisper
And it makes me think there must be
something wrong with me
Out of all the hours thinking
Somehow I've lost my mind

But I'm not crazy, I'm just a little unwell
I know right now you can't tell
But stay awhile and maybe then you'll
see
A different side of me
I'm not crazy, I'm just a little impaired
I know right now you don't care
But soon enough you're gonna think of
me
And how I used to be

I've been talking in my sleep
Pretty soon they'll come to get me
Yeah, they're taking me away

But I'm not crazy, I'm just a little unwell
I know right now you can't tell
But stay awhile and maybe then you'll
see
A different side of me
I'm not crazy, I'm just a little impaired
I know right now you don't care
But soon enough you're gonna think of
me
And how I used to be
Yeah, how I used to be
How I used to be
Well, I'm just a little unwell
How I used to be
How I used to be
How I used to be
I'm just a little unwell



9 Ways to Fight Mental Health Stigma

Talk Openly About Mental Health

“I fight stigma by talking about what it is like to have bipolar disorder and PTSD on Facebook. Even if this helps just one person, it is worth it for me.” – Angela Christie Roach Taylor

Educate Yourself and Others

“I take every opportunity to educate people and share my personal story and struggles with mental illness. It doesn't matter where I am, if I over-hear a conversation or a rude remark being made about mental illness, or anything regarding a similar subject, I always try to use that as a learning opportunity and gently intervene and kindly express how this makes me feel, and how we need to stop this because it only adds to the stigma.” – Sara Bean

Be Conscious of Language

“I fight stigma by reminding people that their language matters. It is so easy to refrain from using mental health conditions as adjectives and in my experience, most people are willing to replace their usage of it with something else if I explain why their language is problematic.” – Helmi Henkin

Encourage Equality Between Physical and Mental Illness

“I find that when people understand the true facts of what a mental illness is, being a disease, they think twice about making comments. I also remind them that they wouldn't make fun of someone with diabetes, heart disease or cancer.” – Megan Dotson

Show Compassion for Those with Mental Illness

“I offer free hugs to people living outdoors, and sit right there and talk with them about their lives. I do this in public, and model compassion for others. Since so many of our homeless population are also struggling with mental illness, the simple act of showing affection can make their day but also remind passersby of something so easily forgotten: the humanity of those who are suffering.” – Rachel Wagner

Choose Empowerment Over Shame

“I fight stigma by choosing to live an empowered life. To me, that means owning my life and my story and refusing to allow others to dictate how I view myself or how I feel about myself.” – Val Fletcher

Be Honest About Treatment

“I fight stigma by saying that I see a therapist and a psychiatrist. Why can people say they have an appointment with their primary care doctor without fear of being judged, but this lack of fear does not apply when it comes to mental health professionals?” – Ysabel Garcia

Let the Media Know When They're Being Stigmatizing

“If I watch a program on TV that has any negative comments, story lines or characters with a mental illness, I write to the broadcasting company and to the program itself. If Facebook has any stories where people make ignorant comments about mental health, then I write back and fill them in on my son's journey with schizoaffective disorder.” – Kathy Smith

Don't Harbor Self-Stigma

“I fight stigma by not having stigma for myself—not hiding from this world in shame, but being a productive member of society. I volunteer at church, have friends, and I'm a peer mentor and a mom. I take my treatment seriously. I'm purpose driven and want to show others they can live a meaningful life even while battling [mental illness].” – Jamie Brown

This is what our collective voice sounds like. It sounds like bravery, strength and persistence—the qualities we need to face mental illness and to fight stigma. No matter how you contribute to the mental health movement, you can make a difference simply by knowing that mental illness is not anyone's fault, no matter what societal stigma says. You can make a difference by being and living Stigma Free.