



## **Know Our Minds Like a Girl**

### **Objectives:**

- Girls will be able to define “stigma” and identify stigmas that affect their lives.
- Girls will reflect on their mental health and how they think about their bodies/periods.
- Girls will be able to know and access resources to aid in their mental health.
- Girls will be able to articulate how and why certain thoughts arise at a given time.

### **Lesson Plans:**

- Opening (5 minutes)
- Defining Stigma (10 minutes)
- Applying Stigma (10 minutes)
- Break (5 minutes)
- Reducing Stigma ( 15 minutes)
- Periods! Yay! (10 minutes)
- Looking After Yourself During Your Period (5 minutes)
- Week Wrap-Up (5 Minutes)

### **Opening:** (5 minutes)

In what ways have your values shaped the way that you assert your passions, especially with issues that others may not always understand?

### **Activity 1: Defining Stigma (10 minutes)**

- Facilitator asks members of the group to give their definitions of stigma.
  - “A mark or sign of disgrace or discredit; a visible sign or characteristic of the disease.”
  - “An attribute which is deeply discrediting.”
  - “A distinguishing mark or characteristic of a bad or objectionable kind.”
  - “Stigma refers to a cluster of negative attitudes and beliefs that motivate the general public to fear, reject, avoid and discriminate against people with

mental illnesses. Stigma is not just a matter of using the wrong word or action. Stigma is about disrespect. It is the use of negative labels to identify a person living with mental illness. *Stigma is a barrier. Fear of stigma and the resulting discrimination discourages individuals and their families from getting the help they need.*

- What kinds of things have stigmas surrounding them? (ex: mental health, periods, virginity, medication, drug use, etc)

## **Activity 2: Applying Stigmas (10 minutes)**

### Questions

1. What are some of the negative things you have heard about people with mental illness? (Responses may include things like a link to violence, etc.)
2. What are some of the positive things you have heard about mental illness? (Responses may include things like a link to creativity.) While this may be seen as positive, remind students that generalizing can also be a form of stereotyping.
3. Why do you think people with mental illness are stigmatized? (Possible answers include “They are seen as being different” and “People don’t really know the facts about mental illness.”)
4. What are some negative things you’ve heard about periods? What are some positive things you’ve heard about periods?
5. What do you think influences perceptions about mental illness? (Possible answers include the media, films, news, newspaper headlines, and stories that associate people with mental illness with violence, the fact that people with mental illness sometimes behave differently and people are afraid of what they don’t understand.)
6. How do you think stigma affects the lives of people with mental illness? (Possible answers include people deciding not to get help and treatment even though they would benefit from it, unhappiness, inability to get a job or find housing, losing their friends, stress on the whole family.)
7. How do stigmas influence the way we might feel about our periods?

# **BREAK**

## **Activity 3 Handout Reducing Stigma—What Works?**

There is no simple or single strategy to eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness, but some positive steps can be taken. Remember the acronym “WALLS” to help reduce stigma.

*For each of the following statements, create a survey that girls can answer to identify their perceptions.*

1. **People should work out their own mental health problems.** Not true. When people have a physical health concern, they generally take some action and often go to the doctor or seek some other kind of help for their problem. Mental illness is associated with changes in brain functioning and usually requires professional assistance. Because of the stigma surrounding mental illness, many people are reluctant to seek help.
2. **Once you have a mental illness, you have it for life.** While it's true that most mental illnesses are lifelong, they are often episodic, which means that the symptoms are not always present. Just like people who live with chronic physical illnesses like arthritis and asthma, people with mental illnesses can, when the illness is managed, live positive and productive lives.
3. **Females are more likely to have a mental illness than are males.** Men and women are equally affected by mental illness in general, but women may experience higher rates of specific illnesses such as eating disorders and depression. Men have higher rates for some disorders such as alcoholism and ADHD. Some illnesses are relatively equally shared by men and women, like bipolar disorder. It may seem that women are more likely to have a mental illness than men, but this may be because women are more likely to seek help for mental and emotional difficulties and to share their concerns with friends than are men.
4. **Medication is the best treatment for mental illness.** Medication can be a very effective part of managing a mental illness, but it is by no means the only type of treatment or support that helps people recover. A wide range of appropriate interventions, including medication, counseling, social and recreational groups, self-help, holistic health, religious support, hospital care, exercise, and nutrition are options for helping people recover and stay well. The best approach is to have a combination of strategies that have been proven to be effective.
5. **People with a mental illness are generally violent and dangerous.** People with mental illness are generally not more violent than the rest of the population. Mental illness plays no part in the majority of violent crimes committed in our society. In fact, a person with a mental illness is more likely to be a victim of violence than the perpetrator. The assumption that any and every mental illness carries with it an almost certain potential for violence has been proven wrong in many studies. Often, it is the misrepresentation by the media that leads to this false belief.
6. **Adults are more likely than teenagers to have a mental illness.** Some illnesses are first diagnosed in childhood but many more begin to appear during the late teenage years and into early adulthood.
7. **You can tell by looking at people whether they have a mental illness.** Sometimes if a person is experiencing symptoms of their mental illness, how they are feeling, thinking, and behaving may be different from what is normal for them, but generally, you cannot tell if a person has a mental illness based on his or her appearance

8. **People with a mental illness are generally shy and quiet.** There is no strong causal relationship between personality characteristics and a tendency to develop mental illness. Some mental disorders, however, such as depression, anxiety and schizophrenia can lead people to avoid or limit social contact.
9. **Mental illness only happens to certain kinds of people.** This is incorrect; mental illness can happen to anyone.
10. **Most people will never be affected by mental illness.** The statistic in Canada is that one in five people will experience a mental illness at some point in their life. When thought of in this context, everyone is affected by mental illness, either directly (by having a mental illness themselves) or indirectly (by knowing someone with a mental illness).

#### **Activity 4: Periods! Yay! (10 minutes)**

*Materials: Facilitator Resource Notes Worksheet*

- How do we feel about our periods?
- Facilitator reviews the functions of female reproductive anatomy by having a discussion about the process & [stages of the menstrual cycle](#) (when ovulation takes place versus a girl's period). This candid discussion should point out to participants that ovulation takes place prior to the start of a girl's period and the time prior to and after ovulation is the most fertile time of a girl's menstrual cycle.
  - Optional: Review information from Facilitator Resource Notes on the functions of the female reproductive anatomy.
  - Good resource for videos include the [Amaze Org](#) videos found on YouTube
- Facilitator asks the group brainstorms the emotional, physical, and cognitive effects of puberty with participants.

#### **Activity 5: Looking after yourself during your period ( 5 minutes)**

- Menstruation is a normal part of a female's life that should not prevent taking part in everyday activities. However, some young women may experience some discomfort such as the following:
  - Menstrual cramps may be uncomfortable either before or during a period. A hot water bottle, a heating bag, or moderate exercise can relieve cramps. If cramps become severe then visiting the doctor to discuss solutions is advised.
  - PMS (pre-menstrual syndrome) can occur any time in the two weeks before menstruation. It can make a woman feel moody, irritable, have tender breasts, or bloating. Exercising and avoiding caffeine and salt can minimize the symptoms of PMS.
  - The use of tampons can increase the risk of TSS (toxic shock syndrome). It is not recommended that females use tampons at night, they should use a pad

instead while sleeping. Changing tampons often and not leaving a tampon in longer than 6-8 hours can reduce the risk.

- Personal hygiene during menstruation is very important. Emphasize to students that it is not unhealthy for a young woman to shower during her period. Wearing clean clothes and changing pads/tampons often will help prevent unpleasant odors.

### **Week-Wrap Up**

- Can you identify what a stigma is?
- What is the difference between a stigma and a stereotype? Or are they the same thing?
- What are some ways that you can take care of yourself during your period?

### **Parent Email**

#### ***Today's Objectives***

- *Participants will be able to define "stigma" and identify stigmas that affect their lives.*
- *Participants will reflect on their mental health and how they think about their bodies/periods.*
- *Participants will be able to know and access resources to aid in their mental health.*
- *Participants will review the emotional and physical effects of puberty.*

#### ***Discussion Questions***

- *How can we (the family) support you as you are going through emotional changes?*
- *What new goals or emotions do you have?*