

## OUR STORIES, OUR STRENGTH: MESSAGES AND STATISTICS

### *SOME MESSAGES YOU MAY BE ABLE TO INCORPORATE:*

**Mental health disorders are treatable.** Most people with even severe mental health disorders who seek help can expect a lot of improvement in their symptoms and are able to return to full functioning. Many recover completely. For each person, the treatment plan is different and takes a different amount of time to find. People with mental health disorders can be very successful if they take care of themselves and get the professional help they need. What you see about mental health in popular culture is a distortion of what's really going on.

**Seeking help and talking about your problems is a sign of strength** not a sign of weakness. Talking about emotion is a sign of adaptability, bravery, self-confidence and individuality. You can do it. When you start to talk about a problem it can seem overwhelming and sometimes feel worse at first, but that will change with time.

**One of the most important factors in recovering from a mental health disorder is the understanding and acceptance of friends.** Friends can make a difference by offering reassurance, companionship, and emotional strength.

**Knowing you're not alone** is an important ingredient in recovery. The more we can do to spread the word about mental health disorders, how prevalent they are, how effective the treatments are, and that they can affect anyone, the more likely it is that we will be able to create communities supportive of people who struggle.

**There are many different types of treatment for mental health disorders.** Combined medication and therapy is commonly the most effective form of treatment. Many people can get better with one or the other. For yet others, help can be found in other options like biofeedback, acupuncture, and other "alternative" treatment strategies. However, a person must be compliant with their treatment - meaning they can't take psychological medications and binge-drink, abuse drugs, hurt themselves, lie about their experiences, or not make healthy lifestyle changes and expect to have their mental health treatment work. **Every person has some responsibility in their treatment.**

**A person can experience a mental health disorder based on their biology or environment, or both.** For some people with a biological predisposition for mental health disorders, a life change can bring out a mental health disorder. A biological predisposition may be present if you have a family member with a mental health disorder. For example, a family history of mood disorders may mean you're more likely to experience a mood disorder. However, diagnosis of a mental health disorder isn't contingent upon someone else in your family tree also struggling. For other people, a very negative environment filled with neglect, abuse, or other difficult scenarios can lead to the emergence of a mental health disorder.

**Mental illness can happen to anybody regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation or background.** Mental illnesses don't discriminate and they deserve the same attention as physical illnesses. Various things effect one's mind and brain, not just mental illnesses, including Autism Spectrum disorders, intellectual disability, and brain injury. All deserve the same respect and understanding as issues that affect the rest of the body.

**Approximately 50% of young people with a mental health disorder have a co-occurring substance use/abuse disorder in their lifetimes.** If you or your friends are binge drinking to the point of passing out, abusing drugs, having unsafe sex with multiple partners, or exhibiting other destructive behavior it will be important to think about why and if there are any mental health issues leading to these destructive decisions.

**Most people have an external life that everyone sees and an internal life filled with thoughts, emotions, and possible mental health issues that they may never express.** Think about your life. Consider the strengths and the things you care most about in the world. Look at your relationships with friends and family. Consider your neighborhood and your culture. That's your external life. Now think about what's going on inside – what you're thinking about and feeling. **If your internal life is unhealthy or overwhelming, destructive, chaotic, sad, upset, angry, anxious or distorted, talk about it with someone who can help you. You're not alone.** Often people hide mental health disorders and what's really going on for them inside.

**The coping mechanisms that people learn at a young age are often the coping mechanisms they use the rest of their lives.** Think about the way you dealt with your first difficult emotional experience. If it wasn't healthy, know that you have a lot of years left to change the negative coping mechanisms. But, if you don't put effort, energy and time into developing healthy coping mechanisms, you'll likely continue using negative coping mechanisms which can negatively impact your life.

**Diagnosis of a mental health disorder is just the beginning and a tip of the iceberg.** Sometimes people feel once they have a diagnosis everything should clear up and they will be fine. **Identifying the problem is a good start, but a person still needs to find what treatment works best for them and deal with changes along the way.**

**Not taking care of your mental health in college WILL impact your future.** Untreated mental health disorders in the college student population, such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders, are associated with lower GPA, higher probability of dropping out, and decreased future earnings.

### *SOME STATISTICS YOU MIGHT USE:*

**Approximately 50% of young people with a mental health disorder have a co-occurring substance abuse disorder in their lifetimes.**

Minkoff, K. (2010). Co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders in young adults: A conversation with the nation's leading expert. *Nami Beginnings (15)*, pp. 10-12.

**The majority of youth with mental health disorders are not receiving sufficient care.**

Merikangas KR, He J, Burstein ME, Swendsen J, Avenevoli S, Case B, Georgiades K, Heaton L, Swanson S, Olfson M. Service utilization for lifetime mental disorders in U.S. adolescents: Results from the National Comorbidity Survey Adolescent Supplement (NCS-A). *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. Jan 2011.50(1):32-45.

**Suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death among college students, claiming the lives of 1,100 students each year.**

Hass AP, Silverman MM, Koestner B. (2005). Saving Lives in New York: Suicide Prevention and Public Health, Volume 2, Approaches and Special Populations. New York State Office of Mental Health.

**Untreated mental health disorders in the college student population, such as depression, anxiety, and eating disorders, are associated with lower GPA, higher probability of dropping out and decreased future earnings.**

Eisenberg D, Golberstein E, Hunt JB. (2009) Mental Health and Academic Success in College. *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 9(1): Article 40.

**More than half of college students have had suicidal thoughts and 1 in 10 students seriously consider attempting suicide. Half of students who have suicidal thoughts never seek counseling or treatment.**

Drum DJ, Brownson C, Burton Denmark A, Smith SE. (2009). New data on the nature of suicidal crises in college students: Shifting the paradigm. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 40(3)213-222.

**Across admissions selectivity, depression ranges from 15.7% at the most competitive institutions to 19.3% at the least competitive institutions. Similarly, anxiety is lowest at the most competitive institutions (8.2%) and highest at the least competitive institutions (11.5%).**

Lipson SK, Gaddis SM, Heinze, J, Beck K, & Eisenberg, D. (2015). Variations in student mental health treatment across US colleges and universities. *Journal of American College Health*, 63(6), 388-396.

**13.5% of college students report that depression has a negative impact on their academic performance.\***

**21.8% of college students report that anxiety has a negative impact on their academic performance.\***

**30.3% of college students report that stress has a negative impact on their academic performance.\***

**8.1% of students had seriously thought about committing suicide at some point in the last 12 months.\***

**In the last 12 months, 54.7% of college students felt “more than average” or “tremendous” stress.\***

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**At some point in the last 12 months, 32.6% of college students reported feeling so depressed it was difficult to function.\***

**At some point in the last 12 months, 54% of college students reported feeling overwhelming anxiety.\***

\*American College Health Association. American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment II: Reference Group Executive Summary Spring 2014. Hanover, MD: American College Health Association; 2014.

**20% of students reported engaging in non-suicidal self-injury in the last 12 months.\*\***

**In the last year, 23.5% of LGBTQ college students thought about attempting suicide.\*\***

**35% of LGBTQ students have had a diagnosis of depression in their lifetime vs. 16.4% of their heterosexual peers.\*\***

**42.8% of transgender students have had a diagnosis of depression in their lifetime vs. 19.4% of their non-transgender peers.\*\***

**In the last year, 32.7% of transgender college students thought about attempting suicide.\*\***

\*\*Heathy Minds Network. (2014). Healthy Minds Study 2014. Retrieved from: [data.healthymindsnetwork.org](http://data.healthymindsnetwork.org)