

Lesson Two: Overview and Background

Lesson Overview:

Students now have an understanding of how our ideas of mental illness are shaped. For the next two sessions, we will examine the five categories of mental illness that we will cover during this series. In this lesson, we will talk about the definitions, symptoms, and treatments of mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and eating disorders.

At the end of this Lesson, students should...

- Understand how and why these mental illnesses are distinct and why they are “legitimate” illnesses.
- Learn to recognize the signs of mood, anxiety, and eating disorders.
- Understand what these warning signs mean; when to take them seriously, when they indicate something else, and when they’re “normal.”

Before you begin...

Review the disorder fact sheets for facts about mood, anxiety, and eating disorders. As the students begin to learn more about mental illnesses, it’s important to make sure that the classroom environment is one where stigmatizing language isn’t used, and where stereotypes are broken down, rather than reinforced. Students may have concern about their own symptoms and/or experiences. When you are truly concerned about safety or well being, you will want to engage your school personnel in addressing the problems. You may also want to emphasize that life-stressors can make one feel depressed, or concerned about body image (or cause any number of “symptoms”), and that one of the elements of mental illness is the degree and duration of the symptoms or troubling feelings. You may not know what to do next: it’s okay to say to a kid something like, “I’m not sure how best to help you deal with what you’re going through, but I’m going to make sure you have the help that you need.” When in doubt, please contact your administrator and school counselor for guidance.

What you need:

- Overviews of mood, anxiety, and eating disorders
- Any art materials students might need for their presentations
- Copies of the eating or mood logs