

Mental health is a person's well-being that enables individuals to lead fulfilling lives and manage daily challenges. Adolescence is a crucial time to develop healthy habits that are important for mental well-being. In the absence of proper knowledge, counseling, and resources, young adults can fall prey to mental health disorders. According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 7, 10-19 year-olds experience mental health conditions, yet these remain largely unrecognized and untreated. Plus, the added stigma related to mental health in our current culture makes it harder to get help from others or even talk about it.

One of the main reasons that stigma exists is because of the lack of education and understanding of mental health conditions. Outdated stereotypes about mental illness can lead to fear and discrimination toward those who suffer from these conditions. Additionally, mental illness is often viewed as a weakness instead of a health issue that requires treatment, leading to feelings of shame for the people who struggle with mental health problems and discouraging them from seeking help.

It takes a lot of courage and strength to face mental health issues, but it's important to remember that seeking help is perfectly fine. There are resources available and people who care and want to support you. Together with the support of your loved ones and experienced mental health professionals, we can not only overcome these challenges but also beat the stigma around conversations on mental health.

To shatter the silence around youth mental health and cultivate an environment that supports and celebrates healing, I recommend implementing **R.I.S.E**, a 4-step method for overcoming mental health challenges and nurturing resilience.

R.I.S.E stands for Resources, Information, Support and Empowerment

Resources - Schools can diminish mental health stigma by spreading education and awareness on what it is like to have mental health issues. Since we learn from stories, Counselors or Authors who have written books on overcoming mental health adversities can be invited to schools to give presentations that spark a conversation around mental health challenges. These can be on varying topics such as anxiety, mood, and eating disorders, exploring your identity during adolescence, and much more.

Mindfulness such as Meditation has been known to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Meditation can be a great way to help you relax and focus on the present moment, which can relieve stress and anxiety. By focusing on your breath and clearing your mind, you will find that you can reduce your symptoms and improve your overall well-being.

By giving meditation and mindfulness classes, schools can help the youth manage their stress and cultivate a sense of calm and inner peace.

Information - When we know the what, the how becomes easier. One of the main reasons for prolonged mental health issues is the lack of proper information. Mental Health should become a focus in everyday life and not only in May which is Mental Health Awareness Month.

It is important to have healthy conversations and debates on topics such as Eating Disorders, Peer pressure, Social Media influence, depression, and many more topics related to mental health regularly so the youth have better knowledge to overcome these issues

Just as our physical health (GYM Period) is a regular part of our school lives, mental health should also be made a normal part of our lives. Moreover, the school association can also organize information sessions or fireside chats with parents on these topics.

Support - We are only as healthy as our community. Each one is responsible for not only our own Mental Health but for those of our friends as well. Usually, the one undergoing mental health challenges feels that they cannot talk to others about their problems or ongoing stress. All of the above suggestions will help in supporting them to open up and seek support. However, there is one practice that would amplify the support even more.

In Indigenous societies, coming together in a circle has been as natural as sitting around a fire and reflecting on shared concerns. It inspires a different quality of conversation. People tell stories and share experiences. We are more likely to speak from our hearts and listen from our hearts as well.

Implementing Sharing Circles in classrooms which can be as simple as sitting in a circle and sharing from our hearts our feelings and emotions can demonstrate that we are all connected and we all have a voice. When we listen to each other without bias and judgment, we can learn from each other's experiences which can cultivate empathy. It also tells the person going through a challenging situation that they are not alone and they have friends to support them.

Empowerment - And finally, empowerment is crucial for building resilience. Empowering the youth to use the resources they have and by giving them coping skills, we can help them to achieve greater personal strength, so they can deal with challenges more effectively. Some of the ways we can empower the youth to build resilience is by building self-confidence, setting goals, and cultivating a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset.

Finally, I'd like to quote *Christopher Robin from Winnie the Pooh*

"Promise me you'll always remember: You're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."

And together, we can shatter the silence around Youth Mental Health and illuminate a path towards a future filled with healthy minds and bodies.

Works Cited

- “Building your resilience.” *American Psychological Association*, 1 February 2020,
<https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/building-your-resilience>. Accessed 8 October 2023.
- “Mental health of adolescents.” *World Health Organization (WHO)*, 17 November 2021,
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>. Accessed 10 October 2023.
- “Mental illness stigma - dealing with stigma and how to reduce it | healthdirect.” *Healthdirect*,
<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/mental-illness-stigma>. Accessed 3 October 2023.
- “Nurture Your Resilience.” *NIH News in Health*, 1949,
<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2022/04/nurture-your-resilience>. Accessed 7 October 2023.
- “Talking Circle – Indigenous Education.” *Comox Valley Schools*,
<https://www.comoxvalleyschools.ca/indigenous-education/talking-circle/>. Accessed 10 October 2023.