

HOW TO BE A MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATE



Grades 8-12 How to be a Mental Health Advocate Health & Physical Education and Social Studies

Purpose of the Lesson:

Learning how to advocate for ourselves and others is an extremely valuable life-lesson. When we understand how to speak out against injustice, we can make systemic change which can improve our circumstances and the experiences of others. Through this lesson, your students will choose a mental health-related cause that they can get involved in and do some advocacy work. They will discuss what being an advocate means and learn from a young person who is doing amazing mental health advocacy work through an empowering TEDTalk.

Curriculum Competencies:

Health Education

- Propose strategies for avoiding and/or responding to potentially unsafe, abusive, or exploitive situations (Grade 8/9/10)
- Propose strategies for responding to discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying (Grade 8/9/10)
- Propose strategies for developing and maintaining healthy relationships (Grade 8/9)
- Develop skills for maintaining healthy relationships and responding to interpersonal conflict (Grade 10)
- Analyze the potential effects of social influences on health (Grade 10)
- Create strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community (Grade 8/9)
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others (Grade 8/9)
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use, for others (Grade 8/9)
- Evaluate and explain strategies for promoting mental well-being (Grade 10)
- Explore and describe factors that shape personal identities, including social and cultural factors (Grade 10)

After Grade 10, Health Education splits off into different subject areas. This lesson is still applicable for Grades 11 and 12.

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Social Studies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions (Grade 8/9/10)
- Assess the credibility of multiple sources and the adequacy of evidence used to justify conclusions (Grade 8)
- Determine which causes most influenced particular decisions, actions, or events, and assess their short-and long-term consequences (Grade 8)
- Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups affect events, decisions, or developments (Grade 9)
- Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments, and compare varying perspectives on their significance at particular times and places, and from group to group (Grade 10)
- Recognize implicit and explicit ethical judgments in a variety of sources (Grade 9)
- Explain different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events, and compare the values, worldviews, and beliefs of human cultures and societies in different times and places (Grade 8/9)
- Make ethical judgments about past events, decisions, or actions, and assess the limitations of drawing direct lessons from the past (Grade 8)
- Make reasoned ethical judgments about actions in the past and present, and determine appropriate ways to remember and respond (Grade 9/10)

After Grade 10, Social Studies splits off into different subject areas. This lesson is still applicable for Grades 11 and 12.

First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

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Video

[Why you should take a break: Prioritizing mental health in schools](#)

- Hailey Hardcastle | TEDxSalem

Guiding Questions:

- According to this video, why are mental health breaks important?
- How did Hailey become a mental health advocate?
- What does advocacy mean to you?
- Why is it important to do advocacy work?
- How did the advocacy Hailey did impact her community?
- How did it impact her own life?

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Preparation: Queue up video/set up projector

1. **Have the students watch the video “Why you should take a break: Prioritizing mental health in schools”** This video can be found [HERE](#).
2. **Pause the video and use the Guiding Questions to spark discussion.**
3. **Define the term advocacy for your students.** Some students may not have heard this word before or really know what it means. Share this definition with them “advocacy is defined as any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others” ([SOURCE](#)). Explain to them that you can also be an advocate for yourself. This can occur in small ways, like asking for more time for a test or setting boundaries when someone is treating you poorly. Or it can be in big ways, like participating in a protest involving social justice.
4. **Have your students reflect on this definition.** To get them thinking more deeply about what advocacy is and what advocating looks like, split them up into groups and have them do a quick mind-map about this term. Have them write ADVOCACY in a circle in the middle of a page, and then smaller circles branching off that can include words they associate with advocacy. When they are done this, have them share their mind maps with the rest of the class.

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5. **Explain the curriculum connections to your students.** Inform them that they will be researching some mental health-related causes that they can get involved in. Then they will actively engage in advocacy work. This can look like it did for Hailey, where they find a cause that they believe in and create a campaign from the ground up. Or it can be as simple as writing a letter to a local member of parliament about something they feel passionate about. They can also join a local group doing advocacy work in their community. (If they want to get more involved with the Stigma-Free Society, they can work at becoming a [Stigma-Free School](#) or they can start a Stigma-Free club!)
6. **Lesson Closure.** Once they have had time to engage in advocacy work in some way, have them reflect on their experience as a class. Here are some questions you can ask to spark discussion:

-How did advocating for the mental health of others make you feel?

-Do you think any concrete change will come of your advocacy work?

-Do you feel inspired to continue advocating for yourself and others in this way?