

ATLANTIC COUNTY
PROUD TO BE
STIGMA FREE

Stigma Free
Atlantic Collaborative
School Toolkit

**A Campaign Against the Stigma of Mental Health and
Substance Use Disorders in Atlantic County**

For further information or an electronic version of this toolkit, please
visit: atlantic-county.org/stigmafree

#stigmafreeatlantic



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The Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative would like to thank Bergen County for their creation of the original toolkit, and thank multiple other counties for subsequent toolkits and their generous sharing of their resources.

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October 4, 2022

Dear Friends,

We know that people with mental health and substance use disorders can recover with appropriate supports and services in the community, yet many avoid seeking help due to stigmas and the fear of discrimination.

The Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative was created to bring mental health and substance use disorders out of the shadows and encourage treatment and support. Greater public awareness about these conditions can help change negative attitudes and behaviors. While each of us can play a role in supporting those whose lives are affected by these conditions, addressing the stigma associated with them requires a broader, collaborative approach. That is why Atlantic County and several other counties in New Jersey have initiated Stigma Free community-wide campaigns.

Over the past several months, a workgroup has been meeting to develop toolkits to help guide municipalities, schools, businesses, faith-based and civic organizations. Each toolkit includes an action plan, talking points, promotional materials, resource list and more. We encourage you to review the materials and consider joining this countywide effort.

Healing and recovery are attainable, but they cannot be accomplished in seclusion. Help us eliminate the stigma and discrimination associated with those challenged by mental health and substance disorders so they will be encouraged to seek and accept help.

We appreciate your consideration and thank you in advance for your support.

Sincerely,

Dennis Levinson
County Executive

Introduction/Purpose

The **Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative** is a countywide program that aims to reduce the negative beliefs associated with mental health and substance use disorders. We are dedicated to raising awareness around mental health and substance use disorders. Our vision is to create a culture where residents feel supported by their community and feel free to seek treatment for the disorders without fear of being outcast.

Stigma is a mark of disgrace which results from the judgment of others. When an individual is labeled by their illness, they experience judgment and prejudice. It brings experiences and feelings of shame, embarrassment, distress, hopelessness and reluctance to seek or accept help. As a result, it is one of the primary reasons individuals do not seek help when they experience symptoms of a mental health or substance use disorder.

The toolkit provides a community guide with relevant information in a user-friendly way that highlights the key components of a Stigma Free Collaborative campaign for schools as well as additional resources. The toolkit will be available to all who are interested in implementing a stigma free community to reduce the negative impact of stigma pertaining to mental health and substance use disorders in our communities. Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative would like to expand the county's awareness of stigma and how it can result in community members not seeking treatment.

Joining the Stigma Free Initiative will:

- Educate residents that mental health and substance use disorders are diseases and must be treated as such
- Raise awareness of the prevalence of mental health and substance use disorders in our community
- Provide public interest in learning what is "Stigma Free"
- Provide residents an opportunity to become involved in their community
- Allow people living with the disease to feel supported by their community and thus decrease feelings of isolation and shame
- Link people in need to local mental health and substance use resources
- Use inclusive, accepting and judgement-free language and choices
- Raises awareness that care is accessible regardless of income

What is a mental health disorder?

Mental health disorders refer to disorders generally characterized by dysregulation of mood, thought, and/or behavior. Mental health disorders encompass a variety of disorders ranging from depression and anxiety to substance and alcohol use disorder and bipolar disorder. Mental health disorders can affect persons of any age, race, gender, sexual identity, religion or income.

What is a co-occurring disorder?

The term co-occurring disorder replaces the terms dual disorder and dual diagnosis when referring to an individual who has a co-existing mental health and a substance use disorder.

While commonly used to refer to the combination of substance use and mental disorders, the term also refers to other combinations of disorders (such a mental disorder and intellectual disability).

Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders

The World Health Organization ranks mental health disorders as the leading cause of disability in the United States and Canada. Mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety or alcohol and substance use disorders, are extremely common in America.

- 21% of U.S. adults experienced a mental health disorder in 2020 (52.9 million people), this represents 1 in 5 adults
- 5.6% of U.S. adults experienced a serious mental health disorder in 2020 (14.2 million people), this represents 1 in 20 adults
- 16.5% of U.S. youth aged 6-17 experienced a mental health disorder in 2016 (7.7 million people)
- 6.7% of U.S. adults experienced a co-occurring substance use and mental health disorder in 2020 (17 million people)
- The average delay between onset of mental health symptoms and treatment is 11 years
- People with depression have a 40% higher risk of developing cardiovascular and metabolic diseases than the general population. People with serious mental health disorders are nearly twice as likely to develop these conditions
- The rate of unemployment is higher among U.S. adults who have mental health disorders (6.4%), compared to those who do not (5.1%)
- At least 8.4 million people in the U.S. provide care to an adult with a mental or emotional health issue
- Caregivers of adults with mental or emotional health issues spend an average of 32 hours per week providing unpaid care
- Across the U.S. economy, serious mental health disorder causes \$193.2 billion in lost earnings each year
- 20.8% of people experiencing homelessness in the U.S. have a serious mental health condition
- 37% of adults incarcerated in the state and federal prison system have a diagnosed mental health disorder
- 70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health condition
- 8.4% of Active Component service members in the U.S. military experienced a mental health or substance use condition in 2019
- 46% of people who die by suicide had a diagnosed mental health condition
- 90% of people who die by suicide had shown symptoms of a mental health condition, according to interviews with family, friends and medical professionals (also known as psychological autopsy)
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are 4x more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth
- 78% of people who die by suicide are male
- Transgender adults are nearly 12x more likely to attempt suicide than the general population

What is substance use disorder?

Substance use disorder (SUD) is a complex condition in which there is uncontrolled use of a substance despite harmful consequences. People with SUD have an intense focus on using a certain substance(s) such as alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs, to the point where the person's ability to function in day-to-day life becomes impaired. People keep using the substance even when they know it is causing or will cause problems.

American Psychiatric Association

Prevalence of Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration reported:

- In 2020, 40.3 million people aged 12 or older (or 14.5 percent) had a SUD in the past year
- 28.3 million people (of the 40.3 million) had an alcohol use disorder
- 18.4 million had an illicit drug use disorder
- 6.5 million had both an alcohol use disorder and an illicit drug use disorder
- Among the 138.5 million current alcohol users aged 12 or older in 2020, 61.6 million people (or 44.4 percent) were past month binge drinkers
- 17.9 percent of people aged 12 or older (49.6 million people) have used marijuana this past year
- Over 3.3 million people used cocaine, 3.3 million misused prescription stimulants, and 1.5 million used methamphetamines
- Among people aged 12 or older in 2020, 3.4% (or 9.5 million people) misused opioids in the past year. Among the 9.5 million people who misused opioids in the past year, 9.3 million people misused prescription pain relievers and 902,000 people used heroin
- Among people aged 12 or older in 2020, 2.8 million people, initiated marijuana use in the past year

One of the primary reasons individuals fail to seek the help they need is due to the stigma associated with mental health and substance use disorders. Main reasons cited are shame and fear of judgment from friends, family, and co-workers. Such judgment is often rooted in a lack of knowledge or training. It is our goal to disseminate information and foster a stigma free environment where people are free from judgment and can get the help they need to recover.

The Stigma Free Atlantic Initiative

Stigma Free Atlantic aims to inspire public interest and open dialogues about stigma. This initiative intends to engage community members to be inclusive and judgment free and educate all to use appropriate language choices. The Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative is working with local schools to help them adopt Stigma Free practices.



Establishing a Stigma Free school will raise awareness of the local mental health and substance use resources available, so no resident feels hopeless or alone. Stigma Free Atlantic will encourage residents to break down barriers, be mindful of their mental health and ask for help when needed. Mental health and substance use disorders have the potential to worsen if left untreated, and complications arise when individuals do not seek help. It is essential that residents seek care and support as soon as the need is identified so recovery can begin, hope is inspired, and tragedies are avoided.

Who is involved? Everyone is involved. This countywide initiative includes all Atlantic County residents, from youth to senior populations, including schools, businesses, municipal leaders, faith-based and civic organizations; every community member is a key stakeholder. We want to link all stakeholders to training opportunities and awareness events aimed at increasing public knowledge about mental health and substance use disorders, the proper language to use to avoid stigmas and exclusion, and knowledge of local resources available to Atlantic County residents.

The following pages include a Stigma Free toolkit for Atlantic County schools interested in joining the Stigma Free Atlantic Initiative. By adopting Stigma Free practices your school will be joining a rapidly growing network of educational institutions dedicated to improving the mental health of our Atlantic County community. It is encouraged for each school to further engage its numerous stakeholders to join the initiative and pledge to be stigma free. Additional information is available at atlantic-county.org/stigmafree.

Stigma Free Atlantic Initiative Resolution

WHEREAS, the Atlantic County Board of County Commissioners, along with the Atlantic County Department of Human Services, supports **Stigma Free Municipalities**, and;

WHEREAS, Atlantic County recognizes that one in five Americans has experienced mental health and/or 1 in 7 a substance use disorder, each year according to the National Institute of Mental Health, and;

WHEREAS, mental health disorders are more common than cancer and heart disease combined, affecting children and adults:

WHEREAS, given the serious nature of this public health problem, we must continue to reach the millions who need help, and

WHEREAS, the stigma associated with mental health and substance use disorders are identified as one of the primary reasons individuals fail to seek the help they need to recover from the disease, and;

WHEREAS, **Stigma Free Communities** aim to inspire public interest and open dialogues about stigma, raise awareness of mental health and substance use disorders and create a culture wherein residents who live with mental health and/or substance use disorders feel supported by their community and neighbors and feel free to seek treatment without fear of stigma and;

WHEREAS, promoting awareness that there can be no "health" without mental health will break down barriers and encourage residents of all ages to be mindful of their mental health and ask for help when needed, and;

WHEREAS, local resources are available to treat mental health and/or substance use disorders so no one resident needs to suffer alone or feel hopeless, and;

WHEREAS, establishing **Stigma Free Communities** will raise awareness of resources, inclusive language, and encourage residents to engage in care as soon as the need is identified so recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided, and;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Atlantic County Board of County Commissioners recognizes the community needs and supports the efforts of the County of Atlantic in designating the county as a **Stigma Free Community**.

Resolution passed August 2nd, 2022

by

Atlantic County Board of County Commissioners

Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Education

Mental health and substance use issues affect everyone. This year, one in five people will experience a mental health or substance use challenge severe enough to interfere with daily living.

In spite of how common these struggles are, it can be difficult for people to know what to do when they experience a mental health or substance use challenge. Some people struggle to find the right words to describe how they feel. It can be even harder to find the right person to talk to. These challenges can prevent people from understanding their struggles and getting the help that they need.

Mental health and substance use education is a key part of overcoming these challenges, making it a vital resource for people living their daily lives. It is valuable wherever people live, learn, work, worship and play.

Improving our understanding of mental health through promotion and education empowers people by helping them develop the skills they need to care for themselves, make good health care decisions, and access the resources they need.

Understanding mental health and substance use disorders is the first step in combating the stigma associated with these illnesses. Poor understanding of mental health and substance use can lead to discrimination and unhealthy coping behaviors, and prevent people from asking for help.

The following resources can be utilized for sponsoring educational opportunities within your community:

What Does It Mean to Be Stigma Free?

This training hosted by the Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative will focus on:

What is Stigma?

How does stigma change the way we think and respond?

Personal stories of stigma.

How simple changes can help those dealing with mental health and substance use challenges.

For more information contact: StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org

Mental Health First Aid Training

Several Atlantic County agencies have Mental Health First Aid certified trainers and offer Mental Health First Aid training sessions for their employees and residents. For more information on scheduling or attending Mental Health First Aid Training contact the Mental Health Association NJ in Atlantic County at (609) 652-3800.

What is Mental Health First Aid?

- Evidence-based interactive course that spans one 8-hour or two 4-hour sessions
- Teaches students the signs of mental illness and substance abuse
- Introduces a five-step action plan to initiate referral to mental health resources

Why is Mental Health First Aid Important?

- Just like CPR, it is a vital skill that improves the well-being of our community
- Helps to eliminate stigma associated with mental illness and substance abuse
- Promotes recovery and resiliency



What is Youth Mental Health First Aid?

Youth Mental Health First Aid is a public education program that introduces participants to risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems, builds understanding of their impact and overviews appropriate supports. This 8-hour course uses role-playing and simulations to demonstrate how to offer initial help in a mental health crisis and connect people to the appropriate professional, peer, social and self-help care. The program also teaches common risk factors and warning signs of specific illnesses like anxiety, depression, substance use, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and schizophrenia.

What do you learn?

Just as CPR helps you assist an individual having a heart attack, Mental Health First Aid helps you assist someone experiencing a mental health or substance use-related crisis. In the Mental Health First Aid course, you learn risk factors and warning signs for mental health and addiction concerns, strategies for how to help someone in both crisis and non-crisis situations, and where to turn for help.

For more information on scheduling or attending A Youth Mental Health First Aid Training contact the Mental Health Association NJ Ruth Kaluski at rkaluski@mhanj.org



Drug and Alcohol Prevention Presentations and Trainings

Join Together Atlantic County is a substance misuse prevention coalition, funded through multiple state and federal grants. The coalition offers drug and alcohol prevention presentations and training. For more information contact JTACNJ@atlprev.org or call (609) 272-0101 Ext 11.



Question Persuade Refer
Ask a Question. Stop a Suicide.

QPR Training

Question. Persuade. Refer.

QPR Mission:

The QPR mission is to reduce suicidal behaviors and save lives by providing innovative, practical and proven suicide prevention training. The signs of crisis are all around us. We believe that quality education empowers all people, regardless of their background, to make a positive difference in the life of someone they know. This 60-90 minute training offers participants a two-year certification.

As a QPR-trained Gatekeeper you will learn to:

- Recognize the warning signs of suicide
- Know how to offer hope
- Know how to get help and save a life

Who is a Gatekeeper?

According to the Surgeon General's National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (2001), a Gatekeeper is someone in a position to recognize a crisis and the warning signs that someone may be contemplating suicide.

Gatekeepers can be anyone, but include parents, friends, neighbors, teachers, school staff, ministers, doctors, nurses, offices supervisors, squad leaders, foremen, police officers, advisors, caseworkers, firefighters, and many others who are strategically positioned to recognize and refer someone at risk of suicide.

For more information contact:
StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org

Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative

Action Steps:

Identify Ambassadors

- A Stigma Free Ambassador is any district staff or student who embraces stigma free principles and will help bring your stigma free initiative to life.
- This ambassador is an involved community member who is connected to the school and understands the specific strengths and weaknesses of your school.

Your choice does not have to be a mental health professional; they can be anyone who is passionate, interested, and energetic. Any proactive school community member can become a Stigma Free Ambassador. An ambassador could be a local football coach, board of education member, teacher, guidance counselor, administrator or student. Often times it can be a person who has personally been affected by a mental health or substance use disorder, either directly or through a family member.

Form a Stigma Free Collaborative

Gather a team of dedicated district staff or students who can help enhance the culture of caring in your community. It would be ideal to include representatives from all the schools in your district.

Host an event to introduce staff, students and parents to your campaign, educate and promote awareness, and gather public interest.

Who to invite to join the Stigma Free Collaborative:

- Administration
- School Board Members
- Staff and students
- Support staff
- School security
- Guidance Counselors/SACs
- Parent Club representative
- Student Government representatives
- School clubs
- Sports teams
- Marching Units/Band/Choir
- Key Club Service Group
- National Honor Society
- Bus Drivers

Goals of Student Group Meetings:

- To open up a conversation about mental health awareness.
- To develop a greater understanding and awareness of mental health and substance use disorders.
- To provide educational presentations regarding mental health and substance use disorders and how to best seek treatment.
- Educate students regarding Stigma Free language that is used to describe mental health and substance use disorders.
- Identifying the shame and blame associated with mental health and substance use and how we can combat this problem.

School Based Stigma Free Action Plan

Below are some ideas to bring your local Stigma Free campaign to life. Feel free to follow these suggestions and plans and add your own that might benefit your school.

- Run a public forum about your Stigma Free practices and efforts.
- Promote *Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Training* for school administration, staff and students. (see pages 9-12).
- Promote community education presentations delivered by certified mental health professionals or prevention organizations that follow best-practices and evidence-based, and adhere to safe messaging guidelines.
- Include the “We Support Stigma Free” tagline/image on material, website, social media, etc.
- Host a Stigma Free or mental health/substance use disorder walk. Host a Stigma Free/mental health awareness concert.
- Set up a Stigma Free booth at school events (Back to School Night, Parent/teacher conferences, school plays, etc.).
- Host a schoolwide Stigma Free poster or door decorating contest.
- Have students compose music that promotes positive messages.
- Coordinate educational events for preschool and elementary students.
- Encourage student Stigma Free after school clubs.
- Dedicate a sporting event to promote Stigma Free Atlantic messaging.
- Develop a webpage with Stigma Free information, inclusive language guidelines, and local mental health resources; at a minimum include a link to the Stigma Free Atlantic site.
- Collaborate with local community service groups and your local Municipal Alliance leaders to host a communitywide Stigma Free celebration.
- Distribute Stigma Free promotional materials to staff, students and parents to place on their private lawns and vehicles, window decals, magnets, stickers, pins and t-shirts.
- Promote personal stories of wellness and recovery.

Remember that Stigma Free Atlantic is a *community effort*; think about the strengths of your individual schools and encourage local residents to take initiative in your Stigma Free Campaign.

Stigma Free Initiative Talking Points

Language can create stigma. It is important that all residents understand and endorse the appropriate way to speak about mental health and substance use disorders.

- Mental health and substance use disorders are a worldwide leading cause of disability impacting the entire community-socially, emotionally, behaviorally and economically.
- Stigma often prevents people from seeking help/treatment.
- This movement transcends any religious/spiritual affiliation, economic strata, race/ethnicity or gender; it does not discriminate.
- We will promote programs that neutralize/eliminate fears.
- We will identify and update available resources for education, treatment, recovery and support.
- We will encourage community well-being, encouraging help seeking behavior as well as raise awareness of actors/events that may negatively impact mental health and substance use disorders and well-being.
- We will hold events, rallies, town halls, etc. to bring light to this topic.
- We will encourage the use of mental health and substance use disorder recovery education.
- We will encourage a culture where it is considered wise to take care of your own mental health and seek treatment and sober living activities.
- We will utilize neutral, sensitive and empowering language and provide access to current recommendations for inclusive language choices.
- We will remove stigmatizing labels surrounding mental health or mental health conditions and substance use disorders.
- We will encourage universal acceptance.
- We encourage everyone to play a part in this movement-from youth to senior populations.

Language Matters!

Language is powerful – especially when talking about mental health and substance use disorders. Stigmatizing language perpetuates negative perceptions. “Person First” language focuses on the person, not the disease.

Stigma Free Language

When Discussing Mental Health Disorders

Preferred Language:	Instead Of:
She is a person living with mental health or substance use challenges or a psychiatric disability	She is a patient
He is a person living with a disability	He is disabled/handicapped
She is a child without disabilities	She is normal
He is a person living with bipolar disorder diagnosis He is a person living with bipolar disorder	He is (a) bipolar
He has a mental health problem or challenge	She is mentally ill/emotionally disturbed/psycho/insane/lunatic
She is a person with lived experience of a mental health condition	She is mentally ill/emotionally disturbed/psycho/insane/lunatic
He is a person living with a brain injury	He is brain damaged
He experiences symptoms of psychosis/ He hears voices	He is psychotic
She is a person living with an intellectual disability	She is mentally retarded
He is a person living with autism	He is autistic
Is receiving mental health services	Mental health patient/case
Attempted suicide	Unsuccessful suicide
Died by suicide	Committed suicide
A student receiving special education services	Special education student
Experiencing, or being treated for, or has a diagnosis of, or a history of, mental illness	Suffering with, or a victim of mental health

Stigma Free Language

When Discussing Substance Use Disorders

Preferred Language:	Instead Of:
Person with a substance use disorder	Addict, junkie, druggie
Person living in recovery	Ex-addict
Person living with an addiction	Battling/Suffering from an addiction
Person arrested for drug violation	Drug offender
Chooses not to at this point	Non-compliant/bombed out
Medication is a treatment tool	Medication is a crutch
Had a setback	Relapsed
Maintained recovery	Stayed clean
Positive drug screen	Dirty drug screen
Person experiencing alcohol/drug problem	Abuser/junkie
Substance use disorder	Drug Habit
Misuse or harmful use	Abuse
Actively/not actively using	Clean/Dirty
Person in risky use or misuse	User
Person with an alcohol use disorder	Alcoholic, drunk
Medication-assisted treatment	Replacement or substitution therapy

Pledge Form

Join the Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative

We Stand with Those Impacted by Mental Health & Substance Use Disorders!

We pledge to increase awareness and greater understanding of mental health & substance use disorders and promise to work to eliminate stigma and discrimination within our organization and larger community. We will strive to promote a message of hope and the belief that healing and recovery are attainable!

#StigmaFreeAtlantic

Name: _____

Agency/Affiliation (Optional): _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Signature: _____

Please submit completed pledge forms to
StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org

Sample Promotional Materials

The following images are examples of promotional materials that your collaborative may want to order from your local printer. The Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative may have a limited number of materials. For more information contact: StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org



Sample Lawns Signs/Posters



Pins



Decals

Sample Press Materials

Sample Press Release

For Immediate Release

Contact Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

Date:

[School/District] DECLARES ITSELF A STIGMA FREE COMMUNITY

Town, NJ- Date- One in five adults experience a diagnosable mental health disorder every year. One in seven adults experience a diagnosable substance use disorder every year. Many of these individuals do not seek help because of fear of shame or judgment from friends, family and co-workers. On [DATE] [SCHOOL/DISTRICT] made the first steps towards eliminating the stigma associated with mental health and substance use disorder. The elimination of mental health stigma will allow staff, students and parents to get the resources they need without judgment.

[SCHOOL/DISTRICT] representatives adopted practices designating the school community a Stigma Free Community in order to create an environment in which staff, students and parents will feel free to seek treatment for mental health and/or substance use disorder without the fear of being stigmatized. [SCHOOL/DISTRICT] joins the County of Atlantic declaring itself as a Stigma Free Community.

[SCHOOL/DISTRICT] hopes to raise awareness of mental health and substance use disorders, provide an effective way to reduce the stigma associated with the diseases, promote the use of inclusive language and encourage those who are affected to seek services and feel supported. The establishment of this Stigma Free Community will raise awareness of local [SCHOOL/DISTRICT] mental health resources so no one resident needs to feel hopeless or alone. The elimination of stigma will enable residents to ask for help when needed so recovery can begin, hope is inspired, and tragedies are avoided.

[SCHOOL/DISTRICT] urges anyone who would like more information on the Stigma Free Atlantic Collaborative to contact StigmaFreeAtlantic@mhanj.org and to help us eliminate stigma and promote wellness amongst all [SCHOOL/DISTRICT] and Atlantic County residents.

###

Additional Activities and Ideas for Schools

1. **Certify Staff as Youth Mental Health First Aiders** – Becoming certified as a Youth Mental Health First Aider will increase your staffs' knowledge of mental health issues, signs and symptoms in young people and their comfort level in discussing the subject matter and assisting a student in need.
2. **Homework free night(s)/weekends** – Everyone, including the staff could use a little more unstructured time. Find a day or weekend where EVERYONE takes off. Post some fun ideas for the free time – cook a meal with your family, play a board game, watch a movie together you all enjoy, have a game of catch, fish at the local pond, ride bikes and have a picnic, etc.
3. **Create wellness opportunities for staff** – Have posters/materials available in the staff lounge that promote Progressive Muscular Relaxation, meditation, or breathing exercises. Start a staff meeting off with a few minutes of stretching or an array of snacks that promote well-being (that does include dark chocolate). Remind staff of the resources available to them should they be experiencing an issue (professional co-workers, EAP, general healthcare provider).
4. **Remind staff that they ARE and CAN be HUMAN** – We all have bad/off days, family stresses, etc. Promoting an environment in which adults feel comfortable saying, “I am a little grumpy, I need a little extra care, I am going to put off this important lesson until tomorrow when I am more myself and let’s do something else instead”, will open the line of communication for the students to speak about how they are feeling when needed.
5. **Establish a Parent Academy** – Whether it be monthly, quarterly, or only once a year – create, plan and promote parent/community programs that support a culture of whole body and mind wellness. This could be a movie screening, a conversation with a local mental health professional, a student panel (former or current) discussing issues that concern them, a talk on a relevant topic (screen time, school violence, substance use, etc.) Where applicable, record the evening and post on the school web site for those who could not attend.
6. **Be Open to Suggestions** – There is no one right formula and no miracle solution that can be introduced to create environments that will guarantee emotional wellness for all or perfectly support those experiencing mental health and substance use disorders. Speak to colleagues about ideas they have employed, research, listen to staff, listen to students, try different approaches, bring in different speakers (you never know who will reach someone). Be Consistent. Be Diligent. Remind Everyone He/She/They Matter. BREATHE!!!!!!!!

Kindness Day

1. Have students write positive notes for each other and place them on lockers.
2. Set up student-run activities throughout the day. (Ex: “thank you note station” have a table run by students that has art supplies so other students can write thank you notes to teachers, students, faculty, etc.)
3. Create a bulletin board where students can post sticky-notes of acts of kindness they have witnessed throughout the school.
4. Create a “Kindness Rocks” garden. Have students decorate rocks with positive messages of kindness and place them in a designated garden or next to a walkway outside so passersby can see.
5. Similar to Elf on the Shelf, designate an object to be the Kindness bear/seahorse/sloth. The Kindness mascot has new messages every day with kind tasks for the students to complete. For example, “bring in canned goods for the local pantry”, “compliment the person sitting next to you”, or “pick up the trash you see around the school’s property”.
6. Host a “Good Deeds-A-Thon” where instead of pledging laps walked or minutes read, students pledge acts of kindness.

Goals:

1. Show students the impact simple acts of kindness can have on a person.
2. Make kindness a part of the school environment.
3. Show students how it feels to be kind to people rather than judgmental.
4. Diminishes stress levels and infuses joy in the school environment.
5. Shifts the school culture to one which not only fosters kindness, but establishes a sense of collective connectedness

Stigma Free Club

1. Create a Stigma Free club in school. In addition to doing their own activities this club can work with the town stigma free committee.
2. The club can meet and discuss ideas for events within the school and community to help promote the Stigma Free initiative.

Goals:

1. Educate students and staff on what the Stigma Free initiative is.
2. Promote the Stigma Free initiative within the schools and communities from student perspective/priority.
3. Create a safe space for students with mental health or substance use disorders or those living with someone with a mental health or substance use disorder.
4. Empower youth to plan and create activities that they view as helpful for themselves and their peers.

Suggestions:

1. Stigma Free fair – have local mental health resources set up tables so students can learn more about them. Include fun activities for younger students to learn about mental health. Use a scavenger hunt format to encourage students to visit the resource tables.
2. Walk-a-Thon
3. Lime Out (blanket the school in lime green, ie. clothing, posters, doors)
4. Bathroom signs with information
5. Daily affirmations/inspirational quotes (announcements/email)
6. Stigma Free Pledge

Mental Health Books

Ideas:

1. Have books featuring character(s) with mental health and substance use disorders in the classroom and choose some for classroom reading.
2. Assign books about mental health and substance use disorders for students to read.
3. Even if a book is not focused on mental health or substance use, if the character(s) experience something that could affect one's well-being, take a moment to acknowledge and brainstorm strategies that could help that character, that encourage problem-solving skills, or highlight resources in the book/life.

Goals:

1. Teach students what mental health and substance use disorders are and what it can look and feel like.
2. Help students identify themselves, a friend, or a loved one who may be struggling in some way.
3. Teach students that mental health and substance use disorders are common.
4. Help students recognize that they are not alone if they have a mental health or substance use issue.
5. Teach older students how to recognize signs and symptoms of a mental health and substance use disorders.
6. Create conversations in the classroom about mental health and substance use disorders.

Possible Books for Classroom or Library

1. *The Girl who Never Made Mistakes* by Mark Pett & Gary Rubinstein (K-3)
2. *A Bad Case of Stripes* by David Shannon (K-3)
3. *When Sadness is at Your Door* by Eva Eland (K-3)
4. *As Brave as You* by Jason Reynolds (4-8)
5. *The Scar* by Charlotte Moundlic (4-8)
6. *The Science of Breakable Things* by Tae Keller (4-8)

7. *Alice and the Fly* by James Rice (YA)
8. *It's Kind of a Funny Story* by Ned Vizzini (YA)
9. *Project Semicolon: Your Story Isn't Over* by Amy Bleuel (YA)
10. *The Wounded Yellow Butterfly* by Linda Diaz (K-3)
11. *Save Me a Seat* by Sarah Weeks (K-3)
12. *Calm with the Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle (K-3)
13. *The Goldfish Boy* by Lisa Thompson (4-8)
14. *Warp Speed* by Lisa Yee (4-8)
15. *The Last Invisible Boy* by Evan Kuhlman (4-8)
16. *Mosquitoland* by David Arnold (YA)
17. *Mental* by Jaime Lowe (YA)
18. *Finding Audrey* by Sophie Kinsella (YA)

Stigma Free Art

Ideas:

1. Have students create stigma free flags and banners to hang around the school.
2. Have students create a stigma free mural for the school.
3. Have students plant a garden dedicated to the Stigma Free Campaign.
4. Have students create stigma free posters and bulletin boards.
5. Give students opportunities to express their feelings on stigma free and mental health/substance use disorders through art using a variety of mediums.
6. Create an outdoor labyrinth on your school grounds or utilize smaller options with the same purpose. (see suggestions 2 and 3)

Goals:

1. Promote the Stigma Free initiative in schools.
2. Remind students about the Stigma Free initiative and how it involves everyone.
3. Help students to discover activities that help them maintain emotional balance using art as the vehicle.

Mindfulness Room

Ideas:

1. Create a designated space where students can decompress, regroup, and practice emotional wellness techniques.
2. Host yoga and/or meditation sessions using the designated space.
3. Encourage different student groups to utilize the space for meeting or team building activities.

Goals:

1. Teach students how to step away from a stressful environment and calm down.
2. Improve students' mood and performance in their classes.
3. Create a new gathering place for students to interact over something that is healthy.
4. Make self-care part of the school day and help students to understand that self-care for emotional wellness is important for everyone.

Suggestions:

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. Soft/Comfortable Furniture | 7. Writing Wall |
| 2. Art activities/available art supplies for free expression | 8. Biofeedback |
| 3. Books | 9. Legos |
| 4. Music | |
| 5. Yoga/meditation/breath work information and practice | |
| 6. Exercise bike or punching bag/punching pillows | |

(Some students need to expend energy to center themselves)

