The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom. In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

### Key Terms

**Mental illness**—Disorders that affect a person's mood, thinking or behaviour, such as depression, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

**Stigma**—When a person or group of people is made to feel ashamed or socially rejected because of factors like illness.

**Stereotype**—An image or perception about a group of people that is commonly believed, but is oversimplified and almost always inaccurate. For example, that people with mental illnesses are dangerous.

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- One in five Canadians will experience some form of mental illness in their lifetime. ([Canadian Mental Health Association](https://www.cmha.ca/))
- 3.2 million young Canadians between the ages of 12 and 19 are at risk of developing serious depression. ([Canadian Mental Health Association](https://www.cmha.ca/))
- Substance abuse—e.g., drug use or alcoholism—are considered mental illnesses. In 2012, approximately 6 million Canadians were coping with this form of mental illness. ([Statistics Canada](https://www.statcan.gc.ca/))
- Suicide is one of the leading causes of death for people from teenagers through to middle-age. ([Canadian Mental Health Association](https://www.cmha.ca/))
- Canada's youth suicide rate is the third highest in the industrialized world. ([Canadian Mental Health Association](https://www.cmha.ca/))
- Depression and anxiety are both mental health issues, but almost half of those who experience them will never seek help. ([Canadian Mental Health Association](https://www.cmha.ca/))
- Only one in five young Canadians who need mental health services will receive them. ([Canadian Mental Health Association](https://www.cmha.ca/))
- A study of TV shows found that characters who were identified as having a mental illness are 10 times more likely to be shown as committing a violent crime than other characters, even though, in the real world, people with mental illnesses are actually 10 to 20 times less likely to commit a violent crime. ([US News](https://www.usnews.com/))
- The study of TV shows also found that extreme mental illnesses like forms of psychosis are depicted far more often than depression, even though depression is six to seven times more common in the real world. ([US News](https://www.usnews.com/))
- The study found that, even when people with mental illnesses are shown getting treatment in TV shows, they are very rarely shown actually getting better. ([US News](https://www.usnews.com/))

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**Elementary Resources**

Celebrity Demi Lovato openly discusses her mental health experiences. She continues to break stigma by serving as executive producer on documentary Beyond Silence which tells the stories of three individuals living well and thriving with mental health conditions. (Photo credit: WE archives)

**NOTE TO EDUCATORS**

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Core Skill Sets: ![Symbol](https://www.abc.com/symbol.png)

These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at [www.WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework](https://www.WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework).
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS
• **Themes:** Health, Local Issues, Values and Ethics
• **Course Connections:** Health and Physical Education

MATERIALS
• Front board
• Paper and writing utensils
• Computer/tablet with Internet access

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS
Students will:
• Develop an awareness of mental health and mental illness
• Analyze the representation of mental illness in entertainment

DISCUSS
1. Why do the authors believe that the entertainment industry’s representations of mental health issues are often inaccurate?
2. What does Bill Lichtenstein mean when he says, “The biggest problem facing people with mental health challenges is stigma. The biggest fuel for stigma is media portrayal?”
3. Why does the article suggest that resources for discussion should accompany movies and television shows that represent mental health issues?
4. The authors state, “Youth first look to other sources, like their favourite movie, to learn about recovery and resilience.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Justify your answer.

DIVE DEEPER
Begin by asking students to take part in “Five-Minute Mindful Breathing Meditation” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVaMLYAiR8o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVaMLYAiR8o) (5:12). Once students have participated in the experience tell them that this is an exercise that can benefit their mental health.

Using a Venn diagram, explore what students know about the similarities and differences between physical and mental health. Discuss:
• What is physical health? What is mental health?
• What does it mean to be physically healthy? What does it mean to be mentally healthy?
• What steps can you take to improve your physical health? Your mental health?

Ask students to divide a paper in half and label one side BEFORE and the other side AFTER. Present students with the following questions and ask them to respond on the BEFORE side of the paper:

• What is mental illness?
• What does it mean to be mentally ill?
• How can you recognize if someone is struggling with mental illness?
• What are the similarities and differences between a physical illness and a mental illness?


After watching the video, ask students to respond to the questions again on the AFTER side of the paper. Ask students to consider and share how their thinking changed before and after viewing the video.

As a class, discuss what mental illness means and clarify some of the specific diagnoses (e.g. anxiety, depression, PTSD, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder).

Choose two characters from television shows or movies who experience mental illness (e.g. Dr. Gregory House, *House*; Kimmy Schmidt, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*; Rebecca Bunch, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*; Sherlock Holmes, *Sherlock*; Kevin, *Split*; Nina, *Black Swan*). Compare and contrast how these characters are portrayed. Are the characters’ mental illnesses discussed directly? Are the characters represented as extreme stereotypes of mental illness? Do the characters’ portrayals contribute to or reduce stigmas related to mental illness? Do the shows or movies represent the complexities of the character’s everyday life or are they defined by their illness?

Have students write a personal response and share:
• Three things they have learned about mental health, mental illness and how the entertainment industry can contribute to stigmas and negative stereotypes
• Two things about mental health and mental illness that they would like to learn more about, and
• One question they still have

RESOURCES
Manhattan Public Library, “YA Books About Mental Health That Get It Right” [www.mhklibrary.org/blog/2017/04/ya-books-about-mental-health-that-get-it-right/](https://www.mhklibrary.org/blog/2017/04/ya-books-about-mental-health-that-get-it-right/)

Toronto Star, “Teens draw on experience to create mental health program for high schools” [www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2017/03/20/teens-draw-on-experience-to-create-mental-health-program-for-high-schools.html](https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2017/03/20/teens-draw-on-experience-to-create-mental-health-program-for-high-schools.html)