



Girl Guides
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Guides
du Canada

Mighty Minds Backgrounder



THE PSYCHOLOGY
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DU CANADA

Girl Guides of Canada would like to thank Kids Help Phone and The Psychology Foundation of Canada for their support and assistance in the development of Mighty Minds. Their expertise in the areas of child and youth mental health has been fundamental in ensuring Mighty Minds is a strong mental health program based on research and best practices for girls and young women across Canada.



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NOTE TO GUIDERS

Please be aware that Mighty Minds deals with a topic that may be considered personal or sensitive to some girls and their families – mental health. This topic may evoke unexpected responses from both girls and Guiders. Please take the time to read through this backgrounder before conducting Mighty Minds with your unit. Guiders may want to consider letting parents know in advance that they will be covering this topic in their unit and possibly share details of the activities they will be doing.

Introduction

*“There is no health without mental health.”
~ World Health Organization*

At the heart of Guiding is developing programming that reflects not only girls’ interests but that also addresses the challenges and opportunities they encounter in an increasingly complex world. From relationships, body image and school to changing family dynamics, life holds many complexities for girls and young women today resulting in a variety of feelings and emotions. Early education in the area of mental health can make a significant and long-lasting impact and can help girls lead healthy, positive and productive lives. Mighty Minds is designed to support girls in facing the ups and downs they’ll experience in their daily lives and to learn to take care of their mental health now and throughout their lives.

Mental health is a vital part of the daily lives of all people and an important component of overall health. With increasing pressures from a variety of sources, maintaining good health is critical to the daily lives of girls and young women. Daily stress, pressure and other influences can make it harder to understand and maintain good mental health. Learning not only about mental health, but also the skills that build positive mental health are important aspects of health for girls and young women today.

Mighty Minds provides an opportunity for units to help girls learn about and build positive mental health while addressing the stigma that exists around mental health in society. Mighty Minds contains activities in the following theme areas:

- General mental health
- Resiliency
- Stigma

Complete the Starter Activity and the Closing Activity as well as **at least one activity from each of the three themes.** After completing the Mighty Minds Challenge, Guiders can choose to present girls with the Mighty Minds crest available in the online store.



Don’t forget to share what you’re doing and how you’re building Mighty Minds with us. Tell us what activities your unit participated in and share photos with us using **#MightyMindsGGC** and **MentalHealth** and the following tags:



Girl Guides of Canada @girlguidesofcan @girlguidesofcanada



Look for the **OUTDOOR** icon throughout this Challenge. This icon identifies activities that can easily be done outdoors with little or no modifications.



Core Program Connections

Completion of Mighty Minds can help girls complete programming in the following areas, depending on the activities chosen.

Sparks

- Being Me Keeper
- Being Healthy Keeper

Brownies

- Key to Me #1, 4
- Special Thoughts Interest Badge
- Key to Me Special Interest Badge
- Key to I Can – Special Interest Badge
- Key to Active Living – #5
- Key to Active Living – Special Interest Badge

Guides

- You in Guiding: Be Involved in Your Community #1, 2
- Discovering You: Discover What's Important to You #6,
- Discovering You: Stay Fit and Healthy #2, 5, 6
- Becoming a Teen Interest Badge #7
- Feeling Good Interest Badge #2, 3, 4, 5, 7
- Design Your Own Badge Interest Badge

Pathfinders

- Girl Stuff Program Area: Girls Just Want to Have Fun Module #5
- Girl Stuff Program Area: Focus on Friendship Module #5
- Living Well Program Area: Let go and Chill Out Module #1, 2, 5, 6, 7

Rangers

- Celebrate Guiding Program Area #23, 27
 - Community Connections Program Area #28
 - Healthy Living Program Area #7, 8, 9, 10, 23, 30, 33
-



What Are Mental Health and Mental Illness?

“Mental health is not a destination but a process. It’s about how you drive not where you’re going.”
-Unknown (healthplace.com)

The concept of **MENTAL HEALTH** can be challenging to unpack and define. Not only is it a main factor in an individual’s overall health, it is a necessary part of living a healthy life. Mental health is the brain’s ability to make sense and interact with the world around us, our capacity to think, act and feel in ways that allow us to enjoy life, realize our personal potential and manage the daily ups and downs of life.¹

The World Health Organization states that, “Mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities. Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”²

Mental health is part of our overall health. It includes, but is not limited to:

- how we feel, think, and behave
- how we cope with the ups and downs of everyday life
- how we feel about ourselves, our lives and our future
- how stress affects us
- how we deal with negative things that happen in our lives
- our self-esteem and confidence

We all experience mental health challenges from time to time. Feelings like sadness, worry, anger and fear are normal reactions to various events in our lives, and don’t typically last very long. If these feelings continue for longer periods of time, become overwhelming, and ‘get in the way’ of daily life, this may be an indication that additional help and support are needed.

Mental health can be both positively and negatively affected by a number of factors such as:³

- Family situation
- Death of a loved one
- Financial/employment status
- Relationships with others
- School/work environment
- Physical health
- Community of residence (i.e.: is it supportive, trusting, isolating, etc.)

MENTAL ILLNESS is a health disorder affecting the mind that changes how an individual thinks, acts and feels causing distress and impaired functioning in a person’s everyday life. Some types of mental illness include:

- Mood disorders: depression, bi-polar disorder
- Anxiety disorders: phobias and panic disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Schizophrenia
- Personality disorders
- Eating disorders: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge-eating disorder

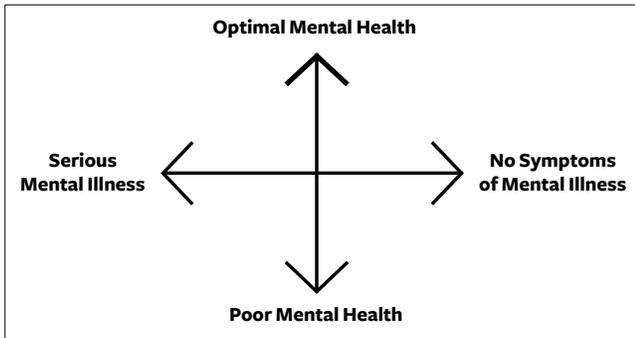
Mental illness is generally believed to be caused by a variety of factors interacting together, such as:

- Genetics – inherited traits that may make a person more likely to develop mental illness
- Environmental stressors
- Exposure to potentially harmful substances before birth
- Brain chemistry – when neural networks that carry brain chemicals are impaired, the function of the nerve receptors and nerve system change

Mental health and mental illness are related concepts, but not the same thing. While everyone has some level of mental health at all times, not everyone will experience mental illness. The concepts are best understood when pictured on intersecting continuums.



Like an individual living with diabetes can live an otherwise healthy life and function well with the right treatment and supports, the same is true in the case of someone with mental illness.



Mental health and mental illness aren't fixed; they change over time and in relation to a variety of influences and factors in life such as stress, lifestyle, health, behaviours, trauma, genetics, etc. When the demands on a person are greater than their ability to cope, their mental health is negatively impacted.

Mental health and mental illness experiences are unique and individual. Assumptions should never be made that one person's experiences are the same as another's. It's important to keep this in mind when talking about mental health/illness to ensure that each person is treated as an individual with unique experiences. This helps in providing positive support, validation and acceptance.

Did You Know

“The worst thing you can do to a person with an invisible illness is make them feel they need to prove how sick they are.”

-Unknown (healthyplace.com)

- Almost **1 IN 5** young people live with mental disorders
- Only **1 IN 5** children in Canada who need mental health services ever receive professional help
- **3.2 MILLION** youth aged 12-19 are at risk for developing depression
- **50%** of mental disorders develop by age 14 and **75%** by age 24

- Girls consistently report more negative emotional health than boys
- Suicide is the **SECOND** leading cause of death for young people in Canada after accidents ⁴
- There are approximately **1.6 MILLION** Canadian adults living with mental health problems that are undiagnosed
- Children and youth are most likely to **CONFIDE** in the following people about their mental health:
 - Friends – 50%
 - Mother – 30%
 - Health professional – 22%
 - Father – 10%⁵
- A 2008 Canadian survey found mental health **STIGMA** exists (but is not limited to) in the following ways:
 - 42% would stop socializing with a friend diagnosed with mental illness
 - 55% wouldn't marry someone who suffered from mental illness
 - 25% are afraid to be around someone with mental illness
 - 50% wouldn't tell friends or coworkers about a family member suffering from mental illness.⁶

Identifying Myths

“Sometimes when I say ‘I’m okay,’ I want someone to look me in the eyes, hug me tight and say, ‘I know you are not.’”

-Unknown (healthyplace.com)

It is a normal part of human nature to question what we don't understand. Since many people don't understand mental health and mental illness, myths and misconceptions exist. While there are many barriers to ending stigma, replacing myths with facts is a small step in the right direction.

MYTH: Mental health problems don't affect children and youth.

FACT: One in five children/youth struggle with their mental health. 70% of adult mental illnesses began



during childhood or adolescence. 79% of youth who receive help improve significantly with treatment.

MYTH: It's the parents who are at fault for children/youth with mental health problems.

FACT: A variety of factors, such as genetics, biology, and environment contribute to mental health struggles and mental illness. No one is to blame for mental health struggles or mental illness.

MYTH: Mental illness is caused by a personal weakness.

FACT: Mental illness is not a character flaw and has nothing to do with willpower. People don't choose to become ill.

MYTH: A person with depression can just "snap out of it."

FACT: Depression has nothing to do with being lazy or weak. Until a person's brain chemicals have been balanced or the triggering factor(s) have been resolved, a person will likely continue to have symptoms. Therapy and medication can help with a person's recovery.

MYTH: People with mental illness are violent.

FACT: People with mental illness are no more violent than others in society and are actually more at risk of being victims of violence.

MYTH: Those with mental illness are responsible for their condition.

FACT: Just like any illness, mental illness is not a choice.

MYTH: People don't recover from mental illness.

FACT: Many people do lead normal, productive lives with the right treatment and support. While a mental illness may never go away completely, symptoms can be controlled.

MYTH: Mental health and mental illness are things to be embarrassed about.

FACT: Neither mental health or mental illness are anything to be embarrassed or ashamed about. Mental health is a regular part of each person's overall health, and mental illness should be thought of as no different than any other type of illness. Being open, informed and

actively involved in discussions can help end the stigma surrounding mental health and illness.⁷

What is Resiliency?

"You are allowed to be both a masterpiece and a work in progress, simultaneously."

~Sophia Bush

RESILIENCY is the ability to recover from difficulties and 'bounce back' from challenges, disappointments, adversity and trauma, and to continue functioning positively and moving forward. Resiliency is more than the ability to cope. It includes the ability to seek out new experiences and opportunities, take risks to achieve personal goals as well as the ability to keep working on hard tasks despite set backs and problems.⁸

Research indicates that despite risk factors, having the ability to adapt to changes in life can stop young people from developing mental health problems.⁹ This ability to 'bounce back' when faced with difficulties, known as resiliency, is therefore one of the most powerful skills girls and young women can develop.

When girls and young women are resilient, they have the skills and coping strategies that allow them to be flexible, maintain their sense of self, rely on social networks and find a positive solution when faced with difficult situations. Resilient people are more likely to be able to resolve personal problems, manage difficult life events as well as the social and emotional aspects of their lives with a more positive feeling. This in turn leads to a reduced risk of mental health and behavioural problems.¹⁰

Resilient young people:

- Cope with and adapt to stress and challenges in life more easily
- Are able to apply lessons from one situation to another
- Are better able to understand and sympathize with the feelings of others
- Are more interested in school



- Are driven to achieve goals
- Are involved in meaningful activities
- Are hopeful about the future
- Have solid relationships with at least one adult in their life
- Relate comfortably with others and treat others with respect
- Work to solve problems even when faced with difficulties

What is Stigma?

“Watch your thoughts because they become your words. Watch your words because they become your actions. Watch your actions because they become your habits. Watch your habits because they become your character. Watch your character because that becomes your destiny.” ~Ghandi

STIGMA “refers to any attribute, trait or disorder that causes a person to be labelled as unacceptably different from ‘normal’ people.”¹¹

It is important to note that stigma is not the same as discrimination. Discrimination is the unfair treatment of an individual due to their identity, including race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. Stigma is a negative stereotype often resulting in discriminatory behaviour.

Stigma surrounding mental health and illness can be just as difficult to deal with as the mental health problem or mental illness itself, stopping many from getting the help they need.¹² There are many causes of stigma including fear, untrue beliefs and blaming of self and others. The negative impact of stigma can be far reaching, affecting:

- Attendance at and/or completion of school
- Getting hired, promoted, keeping a job
- Finding and keeping a place to live in a safe neighbourhood
- Getting proper healthcare

- Feeling loved, needed and accepted by family and friends
- Contributing to one’s community and feeling productive
- Feeling positive about oneself¹³

According to research, there are three distinct types of mental health stigma.

- **SELF-STIGMA:** is the stigma someone feels towards themselves which can stop them from seeking the support of family, peers and professionals.
- **PUBLIC STIGMA:** stigma that comes from the general public towards a stigmatized group. This type of stigma is learned early in life. Public stigma results in prejudices towards those with mental health conditions and infiltrates most social settings adding to exclusion in subtle and blatant ways.
- **STRUCTURAL STIGMA:** is inherent in policies of both private and public institutions when they limit opportunities for people with mental health conditions or mental illness. It is experienced as bias, avoidance, discomfort and discrimination.¹⁴

The words we choose when speaking about mental health and illness can play a huge role in adding to stigma. Many of these stigmatizing words and phrases are commonly used and often go unchallenged, misrepresenting and minimizing the experiences of those struggling with their mental health or a mental illness. Common stigmatizing words/phrases include:

- Crazy
- Psycho
- Insane
- Mental
- Nuts
- Going mad
- “I’m so OCD.”
- “It’s my ADD/ADHD.”
- “Stop being so paranoid.”
- “They’re acting so bipolar.”



- “I could just kill myself.” “I just want to die.”
- “I’m so addicted.”
- “They’re so crazy/insane/mad/nuts.”¹⁵

Language is continually evolving and changing, requiring continual attention to the words we choose, how we use them, and how they can affect others. When language is used in a way that can have a negative impact on someone or perpetuates mental health stigma, it should be challenged and called out. Language should be used in a responsible and intentional way that supports recovery and a person’s individual experience. Mental health concerns, questions, struggles and achievements should be able to be shared openly in a supported environment in order to change stigmatizing beliefs and attitudes.

Tips to Improve and Promote Mental Health

“Feelings are much like waves, we can’t stop them from coming but we can choose which one to surf.”
~Unknown (healthyplace.com)

While Mighty Minds seeks to build knowledge around mental health/illness and help girls develop resiliency skills, there are many small things that can be added into daily life immediately to improve and promote mental health – your own and that of others in your life:

- Do things you enjoy
- Get enough sleep
- Eat nutritious food
- Get your body moving
- Get outside
- Take time to relax
- Surround yourself with supportive people
- Take a break; try again later
- Take care of yourself
- Forgive yourself and others
- Go offline
- Learn to say ‘no’
- Don’t make assumptions
- Communicate openly, honestly and listen without

passing judgement

- Use actions and words that show you value people for who they are
- Assure others who may be struggling that they are safe to talk to you about the good and bad
- Try and see things from the view of someone else when upset
- Model appropriate, healthy responses and relationships with others
- Talk to family and friends about your thoughts and feelings
- Be open to a variety of types of communication; face-to-face may not always be easiest for some people
- Use self-calming techniques
- Try to solve problems rather than just worrying about them
- Challenge stigma when you see or hear it¹⁶

Talking About Sensitive Issues

Mental health is something that is part of all of us. Challenges with mental health or mental illness have likely touched the lives of someone you know, either directly or indirectly with or without you knowing it. There are likely girls and/or Guiders in your unit who have had experiences with mental health challenges or mental illness. You will probably not know who they are, and these individuals may never identify themselves. Mental health is also a subject that may bring up strong feelings in both girls and/or Guiders. These feelings may include fear, hurt, sadness, anger, confusion and shame.

It may be a good idea to let girls know ahead of time that you will be talking about mental health in an upcoming meeting(s). Keep in mind that girls should always be allowed to participate in unit activities to the level and degree they are comfortable with. Girls should never be forced to participate in a way they are not comfortable with. Girls may choose to leave, sit out or remain silent for a time or a particular activity. When discussing and creating a safe space with girls before beginning the challenge, share this information with them, and



remind them of it throughout the activities. For more information on creating safe spaces, see the Creating a Safe Space section on page 13.

Do your best to use language, explanations and examples that are appropriate for the developmental level and maturity of the girls in your unit. If you notice that the mood of the girls has shifted significantly during the challenge, add in an energizer or a short, fun, active activity to take a break for a few minutes. This helps girls to refocus and let go of any strong feelings.

As a Guider, you too may have strong feeling or emotional reactions when leading activities on mental health. Remember to share the load among Guiders. Plan and lead activities together or take turns doing so. Having a debriefing with all Guiders involved after the challenge is complete can help you process feelings and bring closure to the challenge.

Be sure to read through the information on Why Girls May Not Seek Help (page 10), Handling Disclosure (page 13) and Creating a Safe Space (page 13) for more information that will be helpful in discussing mental health with girls.

Why Girls May Not Seek Help

***“It’s exhausting to fight a war
inside your head every single day.”***
~ Mickie Ann (healthyplace.com)

Struggles with mental health are not just a regular part of growing up. There are many reasons why a girl faced with mental health challenges may not seek help. As a Guider, you can provide a supportive and safe unit space where girls feel included and able to be themselves. Girls may not disclose they are struggling; however, you can provide assurances with your words and actions that should they choose to do so they will be heard and supported.

Some common reasons girls may not seek mental

health help include:

- Feeling that asking for help won’t make a difference
- Not wanting to be judged or labelled
- Thinking they have to deal with how they are feeling alone
- Thinking no one cares
- Not wanting to fight
- Thinking the way they feel is a normal part of growing up
- Being afraid
- Feeling afraid they won’t be heard
- Worried parents will ‘freak out’
- Past experiences
- Misunderstandings (e.g., about treatment, medication)
- Thinking asking for help makes them ‘crazy’¹⁷

Be sure to read the section on Disclosure (page 13) for more information on handling these sensitive situations should they occur.



Talking about Suicide

One subject that may come up with older girls when discussing mental health and illness is suicide. Suicide should be treated with the same openness as any other mental health/illness topic and girls should not be made to feel guilty, ashamed or like they have raised a taboo subject. The information below can be used by Guiders to provide support as well as to help gently guide any discussion girls initiate.

Talking about suicide openly does not increase the risk of someone taking their life. Here's how you can help and have an open conversation when suicide is brought up:

- Start gently. Mention changes you've noticed in their behaviour (as applicable).
- Reach out and let them know they aren't alone in what they're feeling and that it's okay to ask for help if/when needed.
- Listen – really listen – without judgement, challenging, becoming angry or shocked.
- Be direct. (“Are you thinking about hurting or killing yourself?”)
- Remind them that you care and that help and/or more information is available.
- Start a conversation with:
 - “I’m worried about you because you seem...(sad, angry, withdrawn)”
 - “It concerned me when you said...” (be specific)
 - “Do you want to talk about it?”, “What can I do to help?”
 - “It’s okay if you don’t want to talk to me, but it’s important that you talk to someone.”

When talking about suicide, **DON'T**:

- Judge – try not to express disappointment or interrupt.
- Talk too much – silences in the conversation are okay. Pauses might result in someone opening up more.
- Minimize – their experiences by saying things like, “it’ll pass” or “life isn’t fair.”¹⁸
- Make promises you can't keep.

It is vital to note that “simply opening up discussion is not an effective way to prevent...suicides – and can even be dangerous – without the right supports in place.”¹⁹ For Guiders, these supports include knowing where to go or refer someone to for more information, how to access services and how to ‘bridge’ someone to an appropriate service. It is recommended that Guiders have the Mental Health Resources document (separate document available on the Mighty Minds page at girlguides.ca) information available for girls at all times.

While suicide may appear on the surface to be an impulsive act, it is a complicated process that someone may think about for a great length of time before taking action. Teens are admitted into hospitals for suicide attempts more often than any other age group with girls attempting suicide more often than boys.²⁰ Estimates reveal that 8 of 10 of those who attempt suicide hinted about it or mentioned their plans in advance. Many times these warning signs are directed at their friends.

Being able to recognize warning signs is one thing, knowing what to do and how to talk openly about suicide is another. While these conversations may be hard, they can save a life. Suicide is about seeking escape from the



pain someone is experiencing; pain so intense that the individual believes only death will stop it. Keep in mind that most people who consider suicide don't actually want to die. They are often undecided and many need the help and support of others to keep them from carrying out suicide thoughts and/or plans. Gut instincts are important; if you think something isn't right you should act on it.

Warning signs are often quite subtle, but can also be quite obvious. There is no ultimate list of warning signs and no particular number of behaviours that need to be present for concern to be warranted. Some common warning signs include:

- Sudden change (positive or negative) in behaviour
- Withdrawing from friends and activities
- No interest in things
- Increase in use of substances such as alcohol or drugs
- Recent loss of friend, family member or other important person in their life, especially if they died by suicide
- Conflicting feelings or a sense of shame about themselves
- Mood swings, emotional outbursts, very irritable or aggressive
- Displaying feelings of hopelessness
- Preoccupation with death and/or talking about death and/or suicide
- Increased risk taking
- Posts on social media where someone:
 - Talks about feeling alone, hopeless, isolated, useless or being a burden to others
 - Showing irritability or hostility that isn't normal for their character
 - Shows impulsive behaviours
 - Posts about continual insomnia
 - Withdrawal from everyday activities
 - Uses negative emoticons



Handling Disclosure

**“What’s broken can be mended.
What hurts can be healed. No matter
how dark it gets, the sun is going to rise again.”**
~ healthyplace.com

If a girl discloses she has or is concerned that she has a mental health concern or mental illness, it is important to take her seriously. The Adult Member Support Module 4: Girl Protection and Self-Harm document provides the following information:

It is essential that Guiders have a full understanding of how to deal with a situation in which a girl requires protection. There are a range of situations that include abuse and self-harm.

As a member of Girl Guides of Canada you are responsible for reporting to the appropriate child protection agency or police when there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a girl is in need of protective intervention. This is not just a GGC policy, it is the law. **If you reasonably suspect a girl is at immediate risk to herself, call 911.**

What is Self-Harm?

From time to time, you may become aware of mental health issues affecting a girl you are working with. This could be evidenced in many ways, including self-harm behaviours such as cutting, talk of suicide, inappropriate sexualized behaviour, behaviours consistent with eating disorders, etc. It is only natural that you may be troubled and confused about how to deal with these situations.

It is important to remember two basic principles:

- First, the girl is a part of a family and her parents or guardians are to be considered as the most appropriate people to deal with these issues unless there is a risk that she is in need of protection.
- Second, it is important to realize that you are not an expert in dealing with mental health issues nor

is it your role to deal with them. However, you still have a role to play in assisting and protecting girls in these situations.

We have a moral and ethical responsibility to talk to the parents or guardians of girls who are doing something out of the norm in terms of behaviour. If you are concerned that a girl may be challenged by her mental health, contact her parents or guardians and discuss the details of your concerns. It is to be assumed that the parents or guardians will take the correct and appropriate action.

If parents or guardians deny there is an issue or fail to ensure the girl receives help, then it may be necessary to involve a child protection agency.

From the Adult Member Support Procedures, Module 4: Girl Protection and Self-Harm. Contact your provincial girl protection adviser or membership@girlguides.ca for more information.

Creating A Safe Space

Topics such as mental health are complex, often raising questions and emotions within girls and young women. It’s crucial to create a space where all girls feel safe to explore these topics, ask questions and express thoughts and emotions free from judgement. Girls should feel supported, respected and able to be themselves through all unit meetings, but particularly when sensitive topics are being covered.

Safe spaces should allow all girls and Guiders to feel comfortable connecting with and sharing their own voice and identity. They allow for everyone to connect with their emotions and challenge messages in a supportive, respectful and protected environment. Girls should feel included, a sense of belonging and that they are able to explore their personal identity in order to gain a better picture of themselves in relation to their world.

Guiders should do their best to see and say things as they are without bias, judgement and prejudice, and



which come from a neutral perspective. It is important to model, particularly for younger girls, the types of behaviours expected in a safe space. Guiders need to always challenge stereotypes, and intervene when remarks and behaviours that are inappropriate occur. It's important that the safe space concept is continually being reinforced. This might include conveying empathy, setting and maintaining boundaries through verbal and non-verbal communication. Guider actions of listening, their non-verbal cues including tone and body language, openness, warmth and genuineness all help build trust among girls and create a safe space.

Before beginning to work through this Challenge, Guiders may want to have girls help define what a safe space is and how it can be maintained.

FOR YOUNGER GIRLS – Provide girls with paper and ask girls to draw what a safe space looks and feels like.

FOR OLDER GIRLS – Begin by asking girls what the word 'safe' means to them. Write their answers on a large poster. Next ask girls what they need from Guiders and other girls for their unit meeting to feel and be a safe place for them. If these ideas are not already on the poster, add them and circle them. If they are already on the poster circle them.

The following are some ideas that you may want to provide as examples for all girls:

- Confidentiality and privacy – don't repeat personal stories or thoughts outside the space without permission first
- Make comments that are supportive, not put-downs, blaming or attacking
- Work on empathy – try and see situations and things from the perspective of others
- There are no dumb questions
- You don't have to say anything if you don't want to
- Listen – only one person speaks at a time
- Allow everyone to express themselves freely; it's okay to show emotion
- Use "I" statements – speak for yourself and your own experiences, not others
- Relax and have fun

Transfer all of the pictures or circled answers to a poster titled "This is a safe space which means..." This could be done while girls are completing another activity. Once the poster is ready, have all girls sign their name and/or place their hand or thumb print on the poster to show their commitment to maintaining the unit meeting as a safe space. Hang the poster in a place it can always be seen by girls.

Bias Awareness and Equity

While no one sets out to approach a complex topic such as mental health from a biased perspective, sometimes we don't even realise we hold particular biases or perspectives until we stop and examine them. Girl Guides of Canada's inclusivity statement is a good place to start in preparing to deliver this Challenge:

Girl Guides of Canada–Guides du Canada (GGC) recognizes and values the richness of human diversity in its many forms, and therefore strives to ensure environments where girls and women from all walks of life, identities, and lived experiences feel a sense of belonging and can participate fully. This commitment to inclusion means GGC's culture, programming, and practices encourage self-awareness and awareness of others; room for difference; and environments where girls and women feel safe, respected, supported, and inspired to reach their potential.

Diversity is more than the colour of your skin or the culture that you belong to. Diversity also encompasses your socio-economic status, personal health, your faith, your abilities, your gender, your age and how you look at your sexual orientation. Equity, in the context of Girl Guides, means that, regardless of how a girl in your unit might be different from you as the Guider or from the rest of the girls in your unit, she deserves to be treated fairly and with respect.

In every unit, you may have girls with different:

- looks
- levels of physical and mental health
- socio-economic status
- ages



Mighty Minds Backgrounder

- religions
- races and cultures
- abilities
- sexual orientations
- family make-ups

Everyone carries biases or perspectives, which are a naturally occurring result of our life, our experiences, the community and family we grew up in and the identities that make us who we are. We cannot help but be biased. We can, however, be mindful of our biases. Problems can occur when we consider our way of doing something, of understanding, or of living, as the only way or the right way. Discrimination is when we take these internal biased thoughts/feelings and project them outwardly through our words and actions. These thoughts and words can be very harmful because they show others they aren't 'normal,' respected, and/or valued. When that happens, those on the receiving end of discrimination are excluded from the group. Recognizing when we are doing this can be difficult; however, it can mean the difference between an environment where groups or individuals feel excluded, and an environment where everyone feels welcomed.

Guiders help ensure that each girl in the unit feels welcomed, safe, and valued for who she is and for what she can contribute to the group.

From the GGC National Bias Awareness/Equity Training Module; please refer to this document for more information.

End notes

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