

Get Help. Get Hope.

A Student Program To Promote Teen Mental Health



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What is *Get Help. Get Hope.*?



Get Help. Get Hope. is an Idaho program you can use in your school to build awareness about mental disorders in teens. You can plan activities to help students with mental illness get treatment – and help other students be caring friends.

Any student or a school organization can do *Get Help. Get Hope.* It can last a week, a semester or a full school year. You pick what you want to do. There are many resources – local and national – that can assist you. Local community groups – such as a National Alliance for the Mentally Ill affiliate or your state Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health – can provide assistance with information and fundraising. Other local community or civic organizations also may want to support your efforts.

Get Help. Get Hope. is based on a year-long successful effort by the students of Borah High School in Boise, Idaho, with the help of Cynthia Swanson, NAMI Boise, Idaho State University Institute of Rural Health and Red Flags Idaho. **If they can do it, so can you!** This guide is designed to guide you as you plan, organize and carry out a successful student mental health project.

Who should organize the project?

Anyone at your school who is interested in teen mental health. Student organizations or clubs, community groups, health classes, teachers and administrators all can initiate a campaign.

What are the goals of your program?

Things you and other students may select as goals include:

- Share information about mental illness and mental health issues with students in your school;
- Inform students about mental health resources; or
- Show students with mental illness that you care about them.

How do I organize Get Help. Get Hope. at my school?

First, well before you want to do your project, discuss your idea with other students. Are they interested in putting together a project? If so, the next step is to talk to your high school counselor, school nurse or your club advisor. Are they supportive? Will they go with you to talk to the principal? Once you have the support of the principal, you're ready to go!

Getting Started...

The first thing to do is to start researching the mental health issues in your school/community and decide which ones you want to target, and in which order. For example, if depression is a big problem for kids at your school, you'll want to do something on depression. This can include having an assembly with a speaker, distributing fact sheets on depression to students or even holding a brown-bag lunch with a local mental health professional. All these ideas are listed in this pamphlet with tips on how to carry them out.

Next, make a plan for your project, or what you will do and when you will do it. All the students who are interested in organizing the project should participate in this effort. Put together a list of activities you want to do. Take out a calendar and decide when each one should occur. For example, if you want to have a book in the library for kids to read about mental health and want to make it available starting in September, you need to pick the book and order copies in May before school gets out. You'll also need to ask community or state organizations to help buy the books. Ask your counselor or school nurse for help in making your plan.

Set a Budget

Before you can ask community groups for financial help, you need to figure out what everything in your plan will cost. Find out what it costs to mail a letter to parents. Find out how many books you'll need and what they will cost. For your budget to be effective, you will need to find out the REAL costs of materials and other things you want to do, not just what you THINK what it will cost. Some materials may be available for free. This pamphlet includes internet sites where free materials may be available. Once you have figured out your budget, organize it to fit on one piece of paper, and bring this with you to meetings with your advisor and principal.



Build Excitement



Share your vision with others (students and adults) to get them excited about the project! It would be helpful to have teams of students so that the workload is shared. The more students involved, the more you can accomplish. A suggested organization is:

- An organizing team could handle meetings and things like copying and distributing any printed materials;
- An advertising team could handle the campaign promotion such as video announcements or articles in your school paper; and
- Another group could be in charge of learning about and presenting mental health information (in writing, by talking to classes or bringing in speakers).

Get Everyone Involved

Use your assets! You will need the cooperation of your principal, office staff and teachers. It is a good idea to present your campaign in an organized way to your teachers at a staff meeting once you've gotten the principal's approval. This will make your life easier when it comes to distributing materials or presenting information during class time. Also, get to know your librarian, who can help you find books for research or group readings.

If your principal and teachers approve, it is great to have a school-wide (short) assembly or speak at an assembly to get the word out about your campaign. This should be kept simple and to the point, while outlining what will be coming in the future, and why students should participate. The goal here is to get people interested in what you are doing.

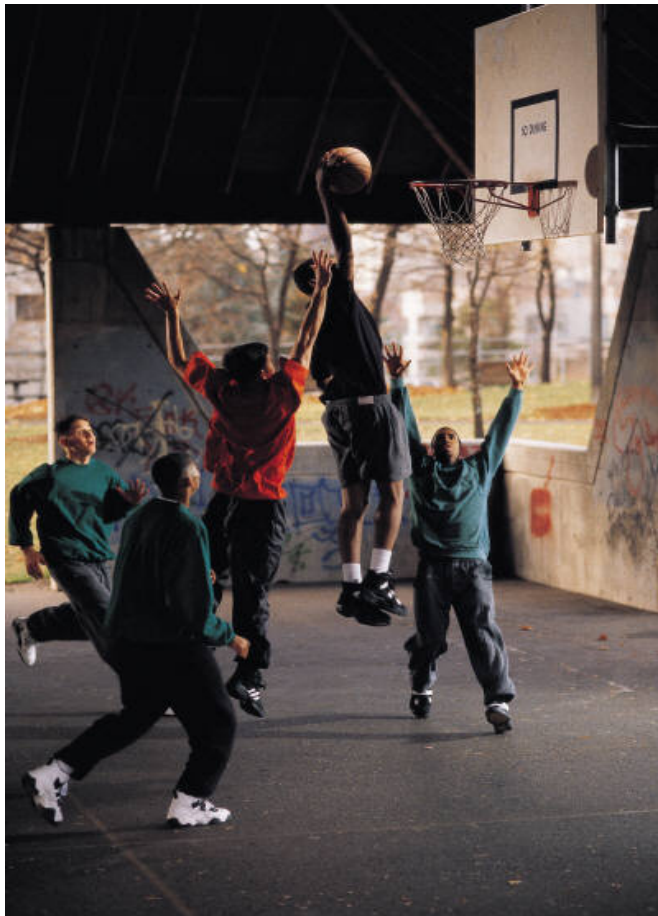
Keeping it going...

To keep your campaign running smoothly, your group should have periodic meetings to make sure things are getting done and to talk about any problems or other ideas. It is very important to be organized with your materials, ideas and budget because the adults you have to deal with will be more supportive of your ideas if you are. It is also important to be flexible during your campaign. Some ideas or issues may just pop up once you've started, and your group should go with the flow.

You will want to meet with your group just before and just after doing a specific project for your campaign. This way you can discuss what you plan to do, who will be handling each part, and then how it went afterwards. This is also a good way to keep everyone focused on the goals of the campaign. You also should periodically review your budget to make sure the funds you need are still available.

Wrapping it up...

When you have finished your campaign, you may want to have a (short) assembly where you have a speaker talk about one of the specific issues you addressed. National speakers are available for free. Contact local mental health organizations for ideas. There also could be some fun activities that students participate in to keep their interest alive during the assembly. Once you are completely finished with your campaign, you may want to meet with the adults at your school. Ask them for any suggestions they might have for how your campaign could have gone better, as well as what they liked about it. A meeting like this with your student group also is a good idea. This way you can discuss what everyone thought was effective or ineffective during your campaign and think of ways to make a campaign like this better in the future.



Ideas for your Project



These are just some of the things you can do... be creative!

1. Resource Cards

- Distribute local and statewide mental health contacts/resources to students
- One way is to provide all the mental health resource numbers on a wallet-size paper or card
- Some numbers you might include are:
 - Idaho Youth Hotline
 - Idaho Suicide Prevention Services Hotline (24-hour toll free)
 - Local Hospital
 - AA and NA for teens
 - PFLAG or other group for homosexuals and their families
 - Church resources
 - Girls and Boys Town National Hotline
- Make sure to include hours of operation (for example, 24-hour hotlines or 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. business hours)

2. “Wear the Facts”

- Designed to “get the facts out” – statistics of mental illness
- Obtain statistics from Internet research or your school’s library, nurse, and mental health professionals
- Students pin sheets of paper to themselves and wear them all day – the paper gives a short fact about a mental health issue
- Get other student clubs involved by having them wear the facts
- This activity stimulates dialogue among students about mental illness and other mental health issues (such as, “what does yours say?”)

3. “Dare to Care slips”

- Prepare small pieces of paper with encouraging (or even funny) phrases on them. For example, slips of paper could say: “Don’t say ‘psycho’ for the day,” “Share a fact about mental health today,” “Tell a corny joke,” or “Tell someone you like their shoes.” Be creative and have fun with these.
- Gets students talking to each other and stimulates positive attitudes
- Distribute slips to classes (maybe first 5 minutes of class during attendance)

4. “Brown-Bag Lunches”

- a. Students attend during lunch periods and bring their own lunches
- b. It can be a discussion period about specific mental illness with a local mental health professional – someone from the school or a local mental health professional
- c. Optional attendance
 - i. To increase attendance, you may work with teachers about offering academic incentives (*extra credit* for example) for attending
- d. Advertise beforehand (posters, morning announcements, class announcements)
- e. Make it fun – not preachy
- f. Let students know who is there to help them with the issue selected for a lunch presentation
 - i. Give out contact info for mental health professionals in your school

5. “Button for a Book”

- a. Choose a book that deals with mental illness or a specific mental health issue (your local NAMI affiliate can help)
 - i. Everyone in the group reads the book (you can even have the books available for the whole school)
- b. Make several copies of the book available in library (you might need 50-100 for a big school)
- c. Design a button that has something to do with the book. Get a donation to make the buttons.
- d. After the book is read, students receive a button
 - i. This can be used for a ‘treat’ from your group or a privilege from a teacher
 - ii. Can use button as a ‘ticket’ to an event such as a dance sponsored by your group or an assembly featuring a mental health speaker
- e. Advertise: tell students about the book, the button, and what they get
- f. *Important!* If you do this, make sure you allow time to design and order the buttons; have them on hand when you start the project – or the buttons lose their effect
- g. Stimulates dialogue about the book and the target issue

6. Student body assembly/wrap-up

- a. Speakers
 - i. Person with mental illness or family member
 - ii. Tips on choosing a speaker
 1. National speakers are best if you can afford it – sometimes speakers will come to schools for free or reduced rates (see if local mental health professionals or NAMI affiliates can help)
 2. Choose someone close in age to teens
 - a. They will be better able to connect with the students
 3. Interview candidates before
 - a. Let them know what you want them to talk about
 4. Give them a time limit! Stick to it so the audience doesn't lose interest
- b. Skits & Games
 - i. You can do skits at assemblies or before sports events
 - ii. Present the best ways to react when a friend talks about his/her mental health problems
 - iii. Show that keeping secrets about mental disorders is not helpful to the mental health of students
- c. Share facts about mental illness
 - i. Reward students for knowing answers to trivia questions about mental illness
 - ii. Members of your group can “quiz” students in the hallways and give them a reward (perhaps candy) if they answer a question correctly



Get parents involved



Parents are happier when they know the programs their teens have in school

- d. Find ways to educate parents about *Get Help. Get Hope.* and learn about general mental health information
- e. Find them where they are already gathered – this makes it convenient!
 - i. Back-to-school nights (guest speakers are available)
 - ii. PTA meetings – or ask them for ideas where to find parents
 - iii. Athletic events
 - iv. Encourage them to talk to their students about mental health and be available if their child needs help

Important Tips for successful campaigns



1. **Start early!**
 - f. Have a plan developed for your whole campaign before you begin
 - g. Make sure your supplies for each part of the project are available and you have donations to buy them
 - h. Meet with key adult contacts to get the project going and to keep it going
2. **Be organized!**
 - i. This will keep your project student-driven – so you can meet the goals you and your group have developed
 - j. Also, it will make it easier for you when you know what's going on and who should be doing what
3. **Be flexible!**
 - k. Once you've planned what you will do, things will come up – be ready to roll with the punches and add things or change your program as needed
4. **Keep it straightforward! Maintain student interest.**
 - l. There are so many things that are competing for students' attention
 - m. No preaching – this is a big turnoff
 - n. Incorporate humor whenever possible
5. **Be creative!**
 - o. Don't feel limited by the projects that are listed here
 - p. Keep the focus on achieving the goals of your campaign
6. **Get to know your techie!**
 - a. This will make your life easier when it comes to video announcements, assemblies, or any other technical things.
7. **Have personal contacts with your teachers.**
 - a. Keep them informed
 - b. Encourage their support for your campaign

Some research guidelines



When you research mental illnesses and other issues for your campaign, Red Flags Idaho has brochures and pamphlets you can get. You also can go on the Internet to reputable sources and obtain reliable information.

- When you are doing Internet research, it is sometimes hard to tell if you are getting reliable, accurate information. This website gives information about evaluating your Internet resources:
<http://www.infopeople.org/howto/bkmk/select.html>
- Sometimes it is hard to know where to start when looking for information on the Internet. This website gives you a place to start for any Internet search:
<http://www.infopeople.org/search/>
- Keep notes about where you found information. It may be important to tell others where the information came from to make sure it's reliable and accurate.
- Keep your audience in mind: you are not trying to give information to doctors or to preschoolers. Respect teens' knowledge.
- Look for information from national mental health resources.

Here is a list of websites with information for teens:

http://www.mentalhealth.org/child/childhealth.asp	The National Mental Health Information Center, sponsored by the federal Center for Mental Health Services
http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/pubListing.cfm?dID=23&start=1&maxRows=15	Publications from the National Institute of Mental Health
http://www.apa.org/topics/topic_children.html	The American Psychological Association
http://www.nami.org/	The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill has materials for students and fact sheets by disorder
http://www.aacap.org/info_families/index.htm	American Academy of Adolescent and Child Psychiatry has publications and fact sheets
http://www.nctsnet.org	National Child Traumatic Stress Network, SAMHSA

Published by:

Better Today's. Better Tomorrow's.
For Children's Mental Health
Red Flags Idaho

Idaho State University
Institute of Rural Health

12301 W. Explorer Drive #102
Boise, ID 83713

In-state: 1-866-572-9940
Out-of-state: 208-562-8646

Email: bettertodays@isu.edu

Website: www.isu.edu/departments/irh/bettertoday's

Additional support provided by:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
National Child Traumatic Stress Network
National Institute of Mental Health Constituency Outreach and Education Program
National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
Office for the Advancement of Telehealth