



When the Mask Comes Off

A Youth Perspective on Mental Illness

A Guide for Community Discussions about Young People and Mental Health

"Everybody puts on this persona in the outside world that is a lie, that tells them they're normal. But when the mask comes off, it's really you. Everyone has that mask. And today, we took off that mask."

Video participant, 15

GENERATION
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Ideas & Tools for Community Change

"Nobody would understand what was happening. I didn't know what was going on with me."

Video Participant, 13

About *When the Mask Comes Off*

When the Mask Comes Off is a 17 -minute video and guide for community discussions about young people and mental health. The video features six young people from New Mexico talking about their experience living with mental illness. Through their voices, we hear honest stories about the struggle to understand and embrace who they are, and the journey toward solutions. The discussion guide provides questions to help people talk about the issue of youth mental illness, and to begin finding ways to ensure every young person finds support for mental health. (*A Guide for School-Based Discussions about Young People and Mental Health* also is available.)

About the national dialogue on mental health

On Jan. 16, 2013, President Barack Obama called for a national conversation on mental health to reduce the shame and secrecy associated with mental illness, encourage people to seek help if they are struggling with mental health problems, and encourage individuals whose friends or family are struggling to connect them to help. In response, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services worked with national partners to develop Creating Community Solutions, an initiative designed to get people and communities talking about mental health. Creating Community Conversations is helping communities organize dialogues and has created resources to help event organizers and participants talk about mental health and take action in their communities. Learn more at www.creatingcommunitysolutions.org. Everyday Democracy commissioned Generation Justice to produce *When the Mask Comes Off* as a resource to complement community dialogue about mental health.

How to use *When the Mask Comes Off* video and discussion guide

This resource is designed to start and guide discussion at community centers, churches, service clubs, after-school groups, and other community meetings. It includes discussion questions and tips for discussion leaders. The content and length of the event can be adapted to fit different audiences and time frames. Plan logistics to accommodate the video screening and either large-group or small-group discussions.

After the video before you start the discussion...

Divide participants into small groups of 6-10 people. Working in small groups will help people get to know each other, keep the discussion manageable and allow each discussion to happen in the time frame you choose.

Ensure that the groups are diverse. Encourage people to join a group that includes people they do not know.

Choose a person from each group to lead the small-group discussions.

As an alternative: Keep participants in one large group, with the moderator leading the discussion. This alternative works best with 30 or fewer people.

Sample Agenda

Opening (large group) – 5 min.

Welcome/Why We're Here

- To dispel misperceptions, myths and stereotypes about mental health
- To include youth voice in discussions about mental health
- To find youth-driven, community-based solutions

Screen video, *When the Mask Comes Off* – 17 min.

Review the following instructions for the discussions – 5 min.

- Separate into small groups of 6-10.
- Each group select a person to lead the discussion.
- As an alternative: The moderator can lead the discussion with the whole group.

Review discussion ground rules – 3 min.

- Listen with respect.
- Some of what we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people.
- Each person gets a chance to talk.
- One person at a time. Don't cut people off.
- When sharing, speak about yourself and your personal experiences, not for a group.
- It's OK to disagree, but no personal attacks.
- If you talk about people who are not here, don't say their names.

Small-group discussions – 80 min.

Closing – 10 min.

- Share a few of the personal action statements.
- Thank participants and let them know about resources for mental health, and additional events in your community.

"You are loved."

Video Participant, 17

Discussion Questions

Making connections (20 min.)

1. Tell us your name and say a little about what you learned in the video.
2. Describe an experience in your life that forms what you believe about mental health.

Addressing challenges and assets (30 min.)

1. What mental health challenges do the young people in the video face?
2. Which of these challenges have you seen in your school or community?
3. What is working to address the mental health challenges in your school or community?

Tips for discussion leaders

- Begin the discussion by going around the circle and giving everyone a chance to respond to Question 1.
- After that, you don't have to go around the circle in order. Just make sure everyone has a chance to speak if they want to.
- You don't have to cover every question. Choose the ones that you think will work best for your group.

Supporting mental health for young people and the community (30 min.)

1. What helped the young people in the video in their struggles with mental illness?
2. What could you do to help someone you know?
3. How can you raise awareness of mental health issues with your friends? Your family? Our school?
4. What top two things should the school or community do to support mental health?
5. What is one thing you will do to support mental health? (personal action statement)

"Having all those people around me is what pulled me out of that deep depression."

Video Participant, 18

About Generation Justice (www.generationjustice.org)

Generation Justice is an Albuquerque, N.M.-based multimedia project that trains high school- and college-aged young people to give voice to activism - locally, nationally, and internationally - through radio broadcasting, blogging, video blogging and digital storytelling. Its mission is to inspire youth to become media makers committed to social transformation.

Generation Justice trains teens to approach journalism from a social justice and media justice framework so that they leave the program more educated about community strengths and problems, equipped with critical thinking, inter-personal, and journalism tools to effectively work on solutions to injustice. The teens go into the community and participate in organizing civic engagement activities highlighting grassroots community organizers, youth activists, and peace makers. In their work, they are challenged to expand their understanding of social justice, democracy, inclusion, and equity.

About Everyday Democracy (www.everyday-democracy.org)

Everyday Democracy helps communities talk and work together to create communities that work for everyone, and helps create a strong national democracy that upholds these principles. It works directly with local communities, providing advice and training and flexible how-to resources.

Everyday Democracy is a project of The Paul J. Aicher Foundation, a private operating foundation dedicated to strengthening deliberative democracy and improving the quality of public life in the United States.

Since its founding in 1989, Everyday Democracy has worked with hundreds of communities across the United States on issues such as: racial equity, poverty reduction and economic development, education reform, early childhood development and building strong neighborhoods. It works with national, regional and state organizations in order to leverage resources and to expand the reach and impact of civic engagement processes and tools.

Mental Health Resources

Information about Mental Health <http://www.MentalHealth.gov>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration <http://www.SAMHSA.gov>

National Institute of Mental Health <http://www.nimh.gov>

Additional information for hosting a conversation in your community
<http://www.CreatingCommunitySolutions.org>

Suicide Prevention Resource Center <http://www.sprc.org>

Addressing Bullying <http://www.stopbullying.gov>

National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention
<http://www.promoteprevent.org>

Find Youth Info <http://www.findyouthinfo.gov>

Resource Center to promote Acceptance, Dignity and Social Inclusion
<http://promoteacceptance.samhsa.gov>

Children's Mental Health Initiative Technical Assistance Center <http://www.cmhnetwork.org>

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For more information on dialogues about mental
health around the country go to:

www.creatingcommunitysolutions.org