

MIXED COMPANY  
THEATRE

# IN YOUR HEAD

EDUCATOR  
RESOURCE GUIDE



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## AKA. FORUM THEATRE 1.1

Forum theatre is an interactive type of dramatic art that focuses on tackling social issues with an intention to stimulate its viewers into action. Forum theatre plays are built by the community they are presented to through the use of extensive workshops and focus groups with a particular community. The scenes in the play are built to represent anti-models. The anti-models present challenging and oppressive examples of various situations and people in positions of power in our lives. The show is performed once and then select scenes are played again. During the scene replays, students can stop the action with the help of a trained facilitator to suggest a more constructive solution to the problems presented in the story. We refer to this as an "intervention," where students can replace characters and become "spect-actors" themselves.

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Through interventions, students will have the opportunity to rehearse for reality in a safe, theatrical environment by creating positive alternatives to the anti-models. Forum Theatre also encourages peer to peer education and positive role-modelling. Every intervention is mediated by a trained Mixed Company facilitator who ensures that the work remains productive and helpful. Since the production deals with sensitive issues, Mixed Company Theatre **STRONGLY** recommends a guidance counsellor be present at the show and available to offer the proper support should the need arise.

In the context of In Your Head, Mixed Company Theatre encourages teachers and administration to also participate in the interventions, and provide examples how faculty can be effective mental health allies.



## **MIXED COMPANY THEATRE 1.2**

**MIXED COMPANY THEATRE PRODUCES INNOVATIVE,  
SOCIALLY RELEVANT DRAMA AS A TOOL FOR  
POSITIVE CHANGE. MCT IS A NON-PROFIT THEATRE  
COMPANY THAT USES FORUM THEATRE AND  
INTERACTIVE ARTS TO EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND  
EMPOWER AUDIENCES IN SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES,  
AND THE WORKPLACE.**

FOUNDED IN 1983



# THE PURPOSE AND PROCESS OF IN YOUR HEAD

## 1.3

The most defining aspect of every Forum Theatre production, is the extensive process of community consultation that drives and determines not only the theme, but the characters, stories, and conflicts that the play hinges on.

The script of In Your Head, written by Forum Theatre playwright Luciano logna, is an outcome of several hours and days of workshops with students across schools in the GTA, workshops that were designed and facilitated by Luciano logna with the support of Mixed Company's Artistic Director and renowned Forum Theatre practitioner Simon Malbogat. In Your Head depicts the words, stories, and conflicts that students expressed and analyzed in the workshops, which means that student voices and experiences form the very basis of its characters, oppressions, and storyline. And so, as it rings true of every Forum Theatre script, In Your Head also presents to audiences an anti-model or worst-case scenario that reflects the voices and experiences of students.

In Your Head intends to engage students and school faculty with topics surrounding mental health by examining the several events that led up to Sam's decreasing mental state and how this has impacted those surrounding him. The production also investigates the affects that social media and online content sharing can have on one's wellbeing and how it can contribute to this issue being exacerbated in a school environment.

Mixed Company Theatre aims to create a safe space for students and school faculty to explore these arising conflicts and create practical solutions in which they can apply to their own lives. It is hoped that it will arouse participants to critically assess the situation and utilize active problem solving skills to address the situation.

# CHARACTER BREAKDOWN 1.4

**Rayna** – Young, determined teenager who admires her older brother Sam, and is confused by his current unusual behaviour. She is worried that Sam's mental wellbeing is going to affect her status and tries to speak to him.

**Mom** – Middle aged, hard working, recently divorced woman. Although concerned about Sam, she is focused on finances and keeping her job. She doesn't have time to deal with Sam's "problem". She hopes that her son's current state is "just a phase" that he'll grow out of.

**Mr. Urban** – Middle aged, high school teacher that works at Sam's school. He is worried about Sam's attendance and his grades which have faltered. He is worried that Sam will lose his chance of getting a scholarship.

**Vince** – Young adolescent and Sam's basketball teammate. When Sam, who was the captain, quit the team, it put Vince at risk of losing his scholarship. Vince calls Sam a "whack job" and wants everyone to know about it by sharing the video online.

**Sam** – Young adolescent and protagonist of the play who is experiencing a decline in his mental wellbeing. He feels exhausted from all of the outside pressures, including those from his family, school, and the relentless expectations that everyone has of him. He doubts whether he can meet these expectations and questions his own self-worth.

**Teen 1, 2 and 3** – Metaphorical beings who represent Sam's thoughts

**Tamara** – Young and confident teenager who is Rayna's best friend. All she wants to do is have a laugh with Rayna and talk about her upcoming birthday party. She cares for her friend but worries that Rayna's confrontation with Vince will affect her status.

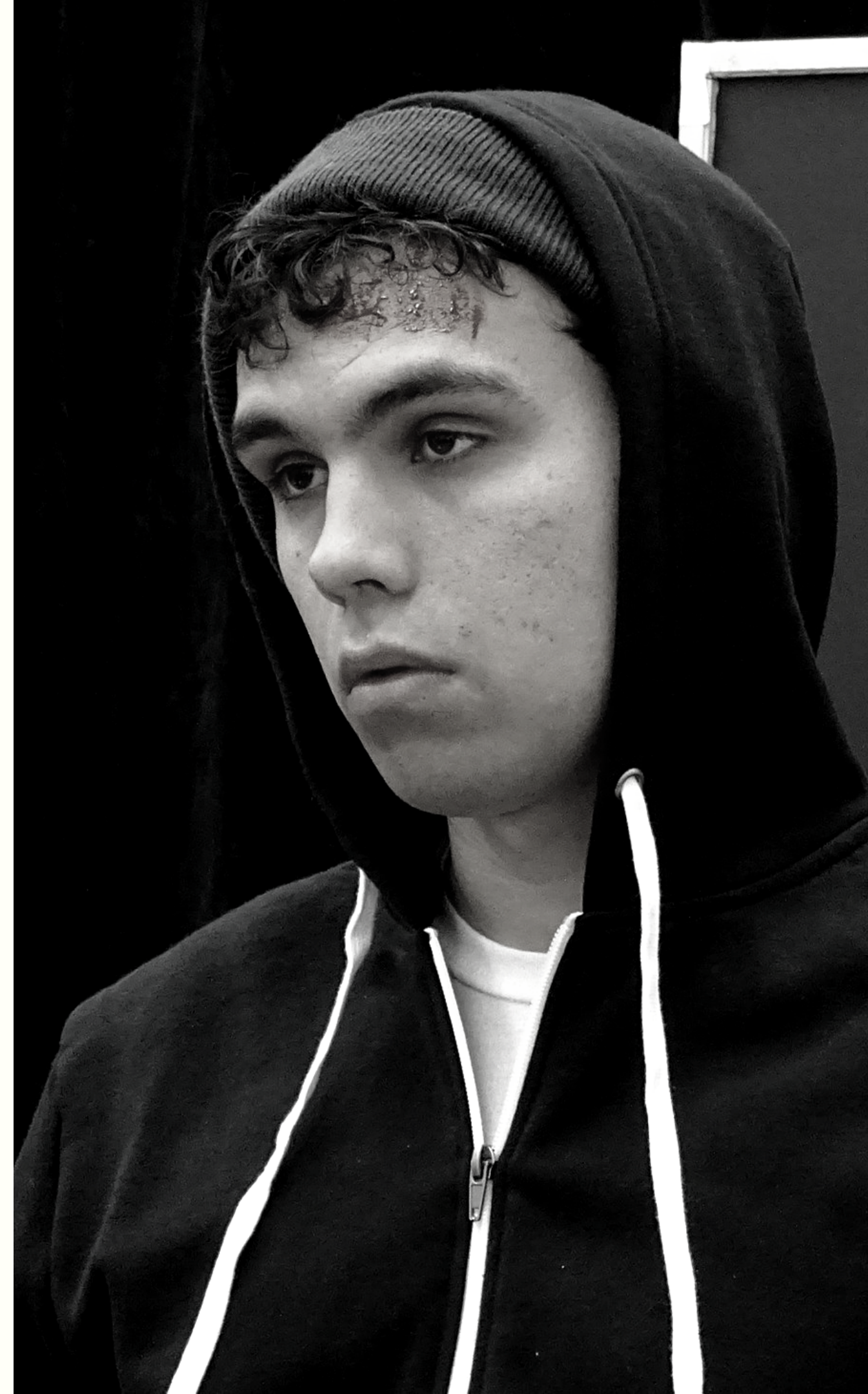
# SYNOPSIS OF IN YOUR HEAD 1.5

In Your Head is an interactive forum theatre piece **that has been developed with high school students** in order to provide a hard hitting and realistic story surrounding about a young adolescent who is facing mental health issues. It focuses in on the various stigmas surrounding mental health through exploring the different characters' interpretations of the situation and the language in which they use to describe it. The performance also highlights how the use of social media can affect these particular circumstances and perpetuate such stigma within a school environment.

The play begins with a conversation between Sam's mother and his sister, Rayna, about his unusual behaviour. It is soon made clear that he is going to have yet another day off of school due to his current mental state. When Rayna arrives in the school hall, she has an encounter with her best friend, Tamara, and her brother's teacher, Mr. Urban, who questions her about her brother's truancy. Mr. Urban tells Tamara that her brother will fail the exam if he doesn't show up. Meanwhile, Rayna and Tamara discuss what an ideal student and basketball player her brother used to be and how things have changed dramatically.

In the next scene, Rayna and Tamara decide to skip school and go to the mall to shop for birthday outfits. Tamara reveals to Rayna there is a video of Sam online lashing out at some of his classmates, and now Sam is being referred to as a "Wacko". Rayna discovers who put the video online and confronts the perpetrator, Vince. Tamara witnesses Rayna's outburst and sees it as a threat to her blossoming popularity and decides to uninvite Rayna to the party because she does not want her "acting out" there too. **This forces the audience to analyze ally ship and its role in building or sustaining friendship.**

Rayna goes home and talks to her brother about how he is feeling. He reveals that he has been experiencing too much pressure from everyone around him and is not sure whether he can deal with everyone's expectations. **This leaves the audience questioning what can make Sam's situation better and what resources are available to him and the family.**





## **SECTION 2 - MENTAL HEALTH**

**"It is not our differences  
that divide us. It is our  
inability to recognize,  
accept and celebrate  
those differences".**

**- HealthyPlace**



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## WHY IS TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH IMPORTANT

Mental Health is an integral part to each individual's overall wellbeing and thus is an important factor to leading a happy and fulfilling life. In any given year, 1 in 5 Canadians experience mental illness or substance abuse disorders. With a figure so staggeringly high, it is essential that educational institutions explore this topic with students and look at ways in which one can maintain their mental, emotional spiritual health.

Aside from the home, children and teens spend most of their time at school. Mental health can affect how students think, feel and act as well as how they make choices, relate to others and cope with stress. As schools are social environments loaded with pressures of achieving high grades and navigating ways to cooperate with others, they have the potential to negatively impact student mental wellbeing. Therefore, it is important to try and make these spaces as safe as possible and have educators familiar with mental health and mental health conditions, so that they can assist struggling students to the best of their abilities.



# IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS 2.1

Here are some valuable considerations for facilitators and educators to support individuals through mental health challenges:

- Know what you don't know and find out who knows it (feel confident connecting youth with the services in your community. Do not feel you are independently responsible for supporting a youth's mental health).
- Educate yourself (make sure you are engaged in seeking ongoing learning and finding resources related to mental health support).
- If someone discloses something vulnerable to you, take an empathetic (validating the individual feelings and journeying with them through difficult emotions), not a sympathetic approach (trying to "fix" their "problem"). - See Brene Brown Resource
- Think about an individual's situation through an intersectional lens (consider how discrimination and the complexity of an individual's social location contributes to their experience of mental health).
- Remember that individuals are not meant to be fixed as no individual is broken- consequently avoid making comments that imply that someone is "broken", "a mess", etc.
- Remember that an individual who is currently in distress has a reduced capacity to take in information. Working towards calming an individual before providing new instructions will be helpful for increasing emotional regulation





# IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS 2.1

- Allyship looks different for each individual. Mental health allyship requires an ongoing commitment to understanding and respecting the different ways each individual wants/needs to be supported in the classroom. Check-in, on a consistent basis, with students around their needs and what support looks like for them in the moment.
- Recognize your own power and privilege in relation to those you are supporting. There may be very valid reasons why an individual will not want to speak with you about their mental health challenges. Do not take it personally if a student does not open up to you, and connect them to other support resources whenever possible.
- Think proactively about how to encourage mental wellness within your school environment. What do you have in place structurally to encourage student safety? Is there a need to train how to support the mental health of students? Does your school have a Mental Health Action Committee, a Positive Space Group or Social Justice Club? Be an active part of making these things happen in your school!
- Practice what you preach. If you are encouraging students to focus on their mental wellness, be sure you are leading by example through your own practices.
- Take a recovery-oriented approach to supporting individuals in their mental health. This means accepting individuals where they are, in their healing process and not ascribing judgment.

# MODEL FOR MENTAL HEALTH ALLYSHIP 2.2

1

## LISTEN

When someone shares concerns about mental health with you, remember that they are sharing something very vulnerable and putting their trust in you as a support. Attentively and actively listen to their story. Express empathy and acknowledge the bravery inherent in expressing a need for support.

2

## CONNECT

People experiencing mental health can benefit from many different types of support. Work to increase and enhance available supports. Become familiar with crisis lines, accessible counselling services and groups available in your area and connect youth to these resources. Know within your position as an educator when you will need to connect students to services.

3

## RESPOND

Allyship is an action word. Work hard to accommodate needs expressed by those seeking support in and outside of the classroom. Additionally, find ways to shape the culture and structure of support in your school through advocating for ongoing staff training and supportive spaces for students that encourage their voice (i.e Mental Health Action Groups, Positive Space Groups, Social Justice Clubs, etc.).

4

## REFLECT

Take time to reflect on your actions. Is there anything you could have done differently? What was effective? How does your own power and privilege impact your capacity to support someone?

# Reflection for Educators 2.3

As a Forum Theatre production, In Your Head contains examples of different ways in which both youth and educators can be oppressive when addressing mental health. The content in the show is a representation of hundreds of students experiences across the Greater Toronto Area and seeks to provide voice for these students' experiences. The examples in the show may or may not be representative of your school. It is important to consider that, In Your Head is presenting worst-case scenarios as a means for catalyzing change. Mixed Company Theatre encourages faculty to participate in the interventions during the show. As educators, here are some points to consider before and after the show.

## POWER DYNAMICS

Do educators hold power over their students? If so, how might this impact a student's willingness to share with educators? How might this impact how they perceive your support?

## GROWTH

Is there room for you to continue to grow as a mental health ally in your position? How do you intend to continue this learning? How can you learn from your students?

## NEXT STEPS

How do we maintain accountability to our student mental health journey while balancing the rest of our work? How do we locate the most appropriate resources for our students?



## **SECTION 3 - ACTIVITIES**

**"The trust is that rarely  
a response can make  
something better. What  
makes something better  
is connection".**

**- Brene Brown**

# POST-SHOW QUESTIONS 3.1

## Big Picture Questions

- a) What were your first impressions of the show?
  - b) Which character could you relate to the most and why?
  - c) What were the main themes in the story?
  - d) Who were the oppressors and who was being oppressed?
  - e) Did you think that Tamara was a 'good' friend to Rayna? Why or why not?
  - f) What were the contributing factors to Sam's decline in mental health?
  - g) How does social media influence our behaviour?
  - h) Did you think Mr. Urban was justified in his actions? Why or why not?
- What would you like a teacher to do?

## Objective:

To discuss and identify the key themes and characters within the show and form a thorough understanding about the importance of discussing mental health within a wide range of contexts.

## Instructions:

Provide these questions on hand outs and/or write them upon the board at the front of the classroom. Give the class some time to digest and form their responses to them. They can even talk in pairs about their answers to the questions and then share back to the whole. Get them to write their answers down so that they can remember them. It's important to note that an agreed classroom guideline for safe discussion should be talked about and established prior to the commencement of this activity. This should include identifying correct terminology, determining how everyone's opinion will be respected and clarifying how one can maintain their own and others emotional and physical wellbeing.



## ROLE ON THE WALL 3.2

### Objective:

To explore the main characters within the story and clarify whether they were the oppressor or the oppressed. To acknowledge which behaviours enabled the characters to gain their particular position of power. To open up the opportunity for students to find personal resonances with the people in the story.

### Characters:

**Sam**


**Rayna**

**Vince**

### Instructions:

Prepare three large sheets of paper. On each piece of paper, write the names of each of the characters you will be exploring. Hand out several post-it notes to each student within your class. If possible, hand out post-it notes of three different colors so that the students can differentiate between each character. Encourage the students to write down facts that they know about the character's persona (their age, what they look like etc) and how that character feels (upset, confused, in denial etc). Ask the students to write down quotes from the play which provide evidence for what they wrote about the character's feelings, and also how they think outsiders may perceive this character.

This activity can either be done in small groups or as each student working as an individual. You can either assess each character one by one or just undertake one assessment of all of them at the end of the activity. Once the students have completed all of their post-it notes, discuss their responses as a class and investigate why it is that each character exerts certain behaviours and how this determines their status of power.





# GAME OF POWER 3.3

## The Goal

To find a way to arrange the props so that one chair is more powerful than the other(s).

## Materials

2-6 chairs, a table, and a bottle.

## Objective:

This game explores negotiation using ambiguous roles and texts. It will uncover how power dynamics verbally manifest themselves in conflict.

FOCUS QUESTION: How can we negotiate and “de-escalate” conflicts?

## Instructions:

1. Ask students to form a circle around the table, chairs, and bottle. This is the stage.
2. Explain that we are going to explore how power manifests or reveals itself through movement and body language. We will use the table, chairs, and bottle as props.
3. Each student will get a turn. Each turn only involves one action. (E.g. You can stack one chair on top of the other but you cant stack the chairs AND push the table away AND flip the bottle all in one turn). One action per turn.
4. After each turn, pause. Leave the scene untouched for a moment. Ask students to observe the change of perception of power. What changes caused it? What made that particular move powerful?

VARIATION: Using the same props, ask students to enter the stage and assume a tableau or position that assumes power. Each student will enter the scene with one action that overpowers the last. They have to be able to hold that position until everyone is on stage. The result will be a Tableau of Power.

## Debrief Questions:

In what ways do we fight for ourselves when we disagree with others? What kind of things do we do?  
How would you rearrange the objects so they were all equal? Is there an “everybody Wins” scenario?  
How does this idea of equality or “win-win” apply to your own friendships and relationships?

# SCULPTING IMAGES 3.4

## Objective:

"Sculpting or 'molding' is the process of creating an image using movement and the physicality of our bodies. This game will explore power dynamics in situations of persuasion.

FOCUS QUESTION: What does persuasion look and feel like?

## Instructions:

1. In groups, ask students to define the term "persuasion." Brainstorm ways or techniques people use to persuade one another.
2. Have the group decide who is the "Sculptor" and who is the "Clay." The Sculptor will be asked to sculpt the Clay into a tableau of persuasion. They can use the list they brainstormed for ideas.
3. Encourage the Sculptors to create the image they want the Clay to make and have the Clay copy what they see. (This is easier than having the Sculptors physically move the Clay with touch.)
4. Do this multiple times so everyone in the group gets a chance to be the Sculptor.
5. Give students 15-20 minutes to complete the exercise.
6. Let the groups decide which was their favourite or strongest tableau of persuasion.
7. Practice and present.

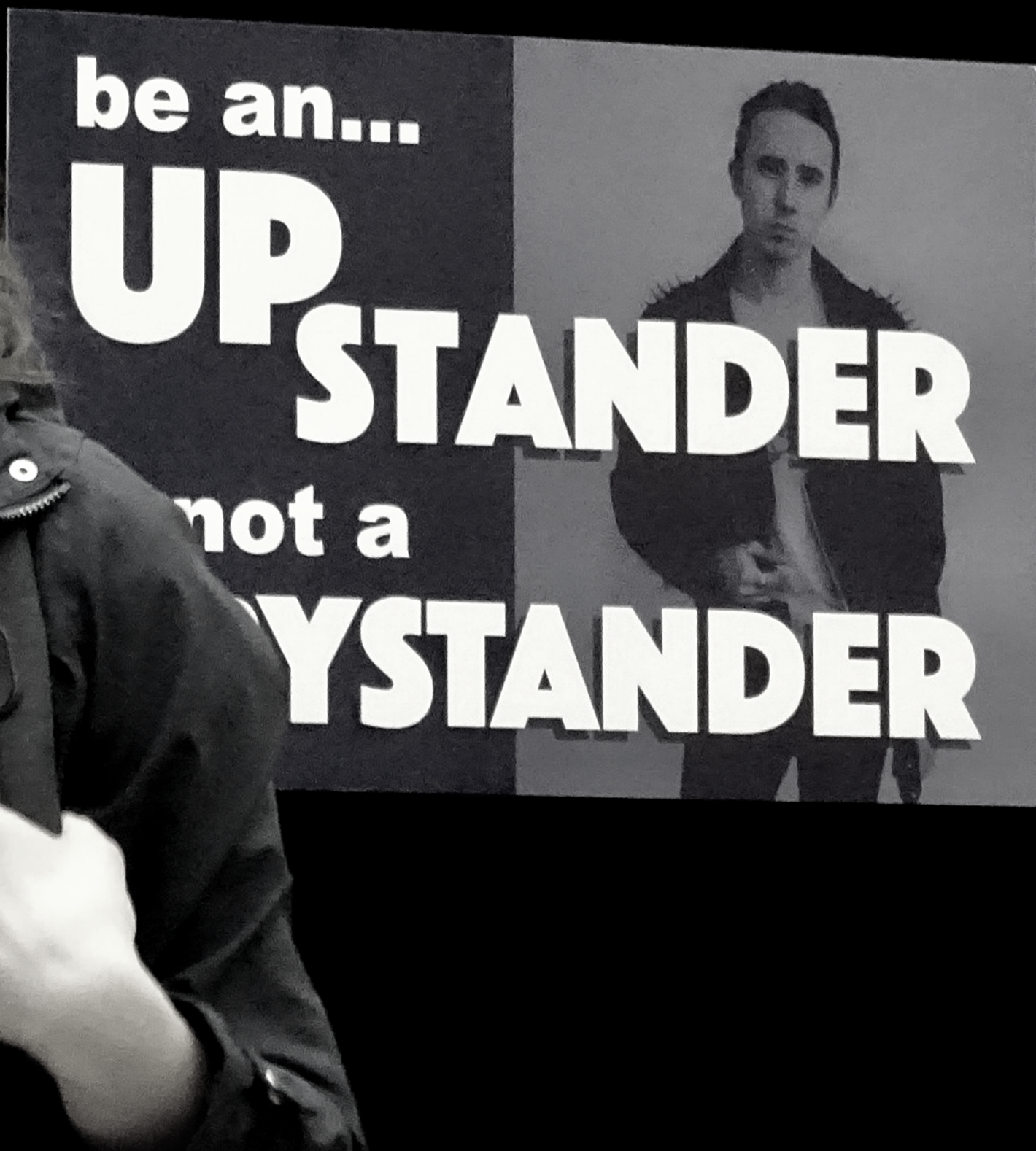
## Debrief Questions

Think of some of the mistakes Rayna, Vince and Mr. Urban made in In Your Head. Imagine someone, perhaps a new character (ie. a teacher, another classmate, a parent, etc.), who could convince or encourage them to make a better choice. Who would be able to change their mind? What would that choice be? What if Vince, Mr. Urban, Rayna actually listened? How did he/she influence them? Why did they listen? Write a monologue or scene to answer these questions.

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## **SECTION 4: RESOURCES**

**"Never apologize to others  
for their misunderstanding  
of who you are".  
- HealthyPlace**



## RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS 4.1

Toronto Distress Centre:

<https://www.torontodistresscentre.com/>

This is a crisis centre which offers over the phone and online messaging crisis services. They provide programs for persons who have been bereaved by suicide or homicide (only applicable to students who are 18+).

Kids Help Phone:

<https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

A 24/7 crisis support service for children and youth

Toronto Rape Crisis Centre:

<https://trccmwar.ca/our-services/24-hour-crisis-line/>

Providing crisis support and mental health support for individuals who have experienced or are experiencing sexual violence.

LGBT Youth Line:

<https://www.youthline.ca/>

Peer support chat line for LGBTQ+ individuals looking for mental health support

Naseeha:

<https://naseeha.org/>

Crisis and mental health support services for children and youth (specifically targeted towards the Muslim community).





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# RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS 4.1

Egale Youth OutReach:

<https://egale.ca/outreach/>

Mental health counselling and drop-in centre for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness

Skylark Walk-in Clinic:

<http://www.skylarkyouth.org/what-we-do/programs-counselling-services/walk-in-clinics/>

This is a walk in clinic which provides free mental health services to children, youth and their families with no appointment or health-card required.

The Merge and Visions 23 day program is particularly catered towards high school students who are facing academic and personal struggles within their school environment.

ROCK Reach Out Centre for Kids:

<https://rockonline.ca/>

A free child and family mental health organization operating within Halton Region, providing walk-in and ongoing therapeutic support

Provides child and youth mental health support groups and drop-ins





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## RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS 4.1

Anxiety Canada :

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/>

An online database providing various resources for children and youth that help in coping with anxiety

Mind Wise Innovations:

<https://www.mindwise.org/blog/mental-health/teens-how-to-help-a-depressed-friend/>

This is a useful blog offering advice to young people about how to go about providing support to a peer who is suffering ill mental health. It also gives good information about how to seek help from others if a young person is experiencing depression or other mental health problems.

Melissa Kinghorn - Stigma:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=38&v=aqw4J9AVFvc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=38&v=aqw4J9AVFvc)

This video provides an understanding about the stigmas surrounding mental health and how damaging this particular thing can be to someone's recovery.

It gives some detail about how to avoid stigmatization and be an ally to someone who is going through a particularly difficult time.





## RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS 4.2

Promoting Mental Health: Finding a Shared Language: <https://vimeo.com/130580621>

This is a six minute video that helps to create a better understanding about mental health and well-being.

It gives a clear description between mental illness and mental health.

Understanding Stigma:

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/live/understanding-stigma/>

This is a series of videos that can help to form an understanding about the stigma surrounding mental health challenges.

Brene Brown on Empathy:

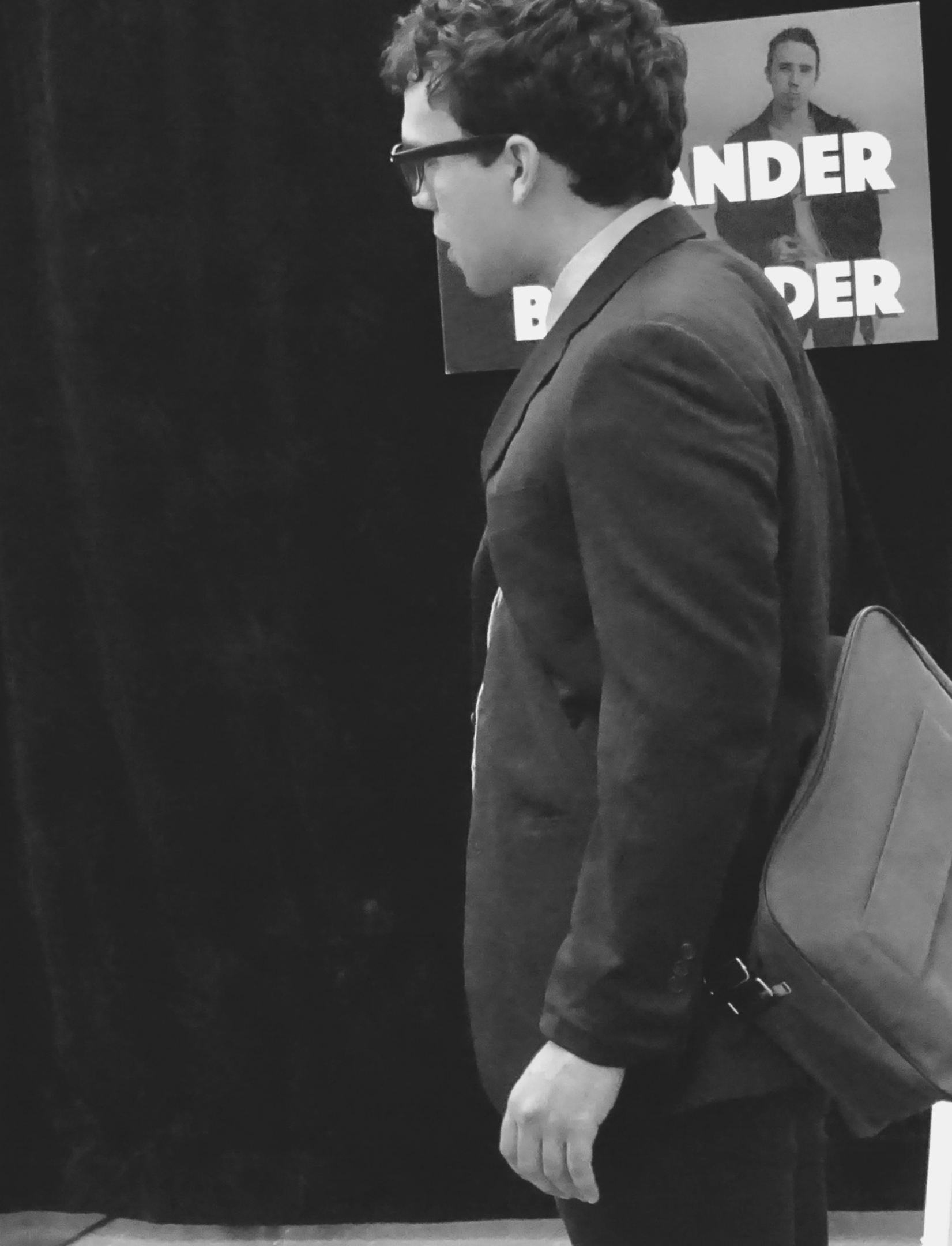
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

A video by Brene Brown outlining the key differences between empathetic and sympathetic approaches to support an individual through mental health challenges.

Substance Abuse Program for African Canadian and Caribbean Youth:

<https://www.camh.ca/en/your-care/programs-and-services/substance-use-program-for-african-canadian-caribbean-youth>

Provides support and counselling to African and Caribbean Canadian youth who are dealing with problem substance use and mental health concerns.



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# RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS 4.2

When Something is Wrong: Strategies for Teachers

<https://www.cmho.org/documents/res-cprf-teachers-2007.pdf>

This Canadian guide (available in French or English) helps identify mood, thinking and behaviour disorders in young people and provides some practical pointers on how to deal with these concerns within the classroom.

Supporting Minds: An Educators Guide to Supporting Students Mental Health and Well-being

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/SupportingMinds.pdf>

This provides educators with information on the early signs of mental health and addiction problems, along with strategies that can be used in the classroom to support students.

Pillars of Youth Peer Support

<http://www.excellenceforchildand youth.ca/blog/pillars-youth-peer-support>

This is a nine-part video learning series which introduces young people to key elements of youth peer support and helps to build their confidence in providing support to peers.



# GLOSSARY

## 4.3

### Allyship:

An action and commitment to an individual or group that supports them in a meaningful and helpful way. It is not a state of being, nor is Ally a title one holds without continual action.

### Depressive Disorder:

A mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. It affects how you feel, think and behave and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems. Someone whom is diagnosed with a depressive disorder may have trouble doing normal day-to-day activities, and in more extreme cases may feel as if life isn't worth living. There are treatments for differing levels and types of depressive disorders that may require medication and/or different forms of self-help in order to relieve some of the more severe symptoms.

# GLOSSARY

## 4.3

### Intersectionality:

A concept that describes the ways in which oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. Each individual's life can be examined from an intersectional lens by conditioning how an individual's social location provides various forms of privilege and marginalization.

### Mental Health:

Our emotions, our thoughts and feelings, our ability to solve problems and overcome difficulties, our social connections, and our understanding of the world. When we have positive mental health, it means we have a good balance between these things and thus we can generally cope with everyday life. However, if these things become unbalanced, then our mental wellbeing will be affected, and it will become harder to cope. You can have poor mental health without having a mental illness.

# GLOSSARY

## 4.3

### Mental Health Condition:

A condition that affects the way that people think, feel, behave, or interact with others. There are many different mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder (etc), and each has different symptoms that impact people's lives in different ways. They are usually the result of complicated conditions that develop from a combination of genetics, biology, environment, and life experiences. Mental health conditions can be treated and most people who have them can recover and lead happy and productive lives if they are provided with adequate support.

### Oppression:

A situation in which people are governed in an unfair and cruel way and prevented from having opportunities and freedom. This can be done both implicitly and explicitly (eg. Sexism, Racism, Homophobia, Transphobia, Ableism, etc.)

# GLOSSARY

## 4.3

### Stigma:

A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person. When referring to stigma surrounding mental illness, this means that those with an illness are labelled by this alone and they are no longer seen as an individual but as part of a stereotyped group. Negative attitudes and beliefs toward this group create prejudice which leads to discrimination

### Wellbeing:

The experience of health, happiness, and prosperity. It includes having good mental health, high life satisfaction, and a sense of meaning or purpose. More generally, wellbeing is just the state of feeling well.



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## Connect With Us!

### 4.4



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# Thank You

We send our gratitude to all the students, educators, and schools that became an integral part of the creation and performance of In Your Head

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