

TOOLKIT

END THE SILENCE, START THE CONVERSATION



A Toolkit for Adults
Supporting Youth
Mental Health



CONTENT CREATED BY:



FUNDING PROVIDED BY:





Toolkit Introduction

Many people are hesitant to talk about mental health because they are afraid of what others will think and fear that they will be judged. If we want the next generation of Arkansans (i.e., kids and teens) to have better understanding of mental health, we have to talk to them about it. Talking about mental health helps kids and teens understand that feelings are normal and teaches them ways to manage stress and express emotions. However, if you are not in the habit of talking about mental health, it can be challenging to start.

Mental health stigma refers to negative attitudes and beliefs about mental health conditions.

Mental health can have a stigma surrounding it because of lack of understanding, fear, or misinformation. Mental health stigma can make life harder for young people and can cause them to feel ashamed or afraid to ask for help. It can lead to unfair treatment of people, including children and youth, who have a mental health condition.

As adults who care about youth—whether you're a parent, teacher, coach, or mentor—you can help change mental health stigma in Arkansas. You play an important role in creating a safe space and supportive community for young people. This guide will show you how to learn more and start talking about mental health! Everyone can start talking about mental health and find ways to reduce stigma. Even if your circle is small (e.g., parents, friends, family), you can make a difference. When we start talking, we give young people the confidence to build skills for positive mental health and to ask for support they need to live healthier, happier lives.

#EndTheSilence #StartTheConversation



How to Support Youth Mental Health

Fighting mental health stigma and supporting youth mental health can feel like a massive undertaking, and it can be hard to know how to start. This toolkit seeks to help by providing a framework for how to fight stigma. You may already be working to challenge mental health stigma or know how to help in your community. However, wherever you are on your own journey, it is always important to step back and self-reflect before taking action. This toolkit will expand upon each of these steps in the coming pages.

1

Learn More about Mental Health and Stigma

Supporting youth mental health starts with educating yourself about mental health and well-being. Perpetuating misinformation or misunderstandings about mental health can create stigma and make someone struggling with their mental health feel isolated and judged. Learn the facts to help break down barriers.

2

Find Help in Your Community

After learning facts to break down barriers within yourself, the next step is connecting with your local community resources. This guide can help you identify what resources are available and where potential gaps in mental health service might exist.

3

Build Skills to Improve Mental Health

Combatting stigma and working to end the silence doesn't just happen when a person is in crisis. Practicing daily mindfulness and reflection can help you regulate your emotions and model good mental health practices to youth. This guide can give you ways to start building skills.

4

Take Action in Your Community

Now that you have worked to educate yourself and build your own skills, it is time to plan how you can take action and help members of your community. This toolkit has a planning guide with worksheets to help you brainstorm and come up with an action plan.



Learn More about Mental Health and Stigma

The first and most important step is to educate yourself about mental health and mental health treatment. Many myths and misunderstandings create stigma. By learning the facts, you can help break down those barriers and change the things you might unintentionally be doing to reinforce mental health stigma.

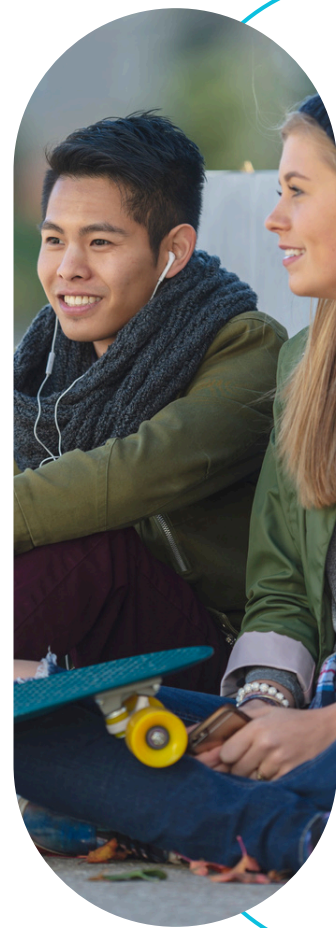
Think about how you talk about
mental health. Ask yourself:

- *If someone in the room had a mental health concern, would they feel safe and supported by how I'm speaking?*
- *When I talk about another person with a mental health concern, am I showing the people around me I care about mental health?*

When we use kind and supportive language, we let everyone around us know (including kids and teens) that they are not alone and have someone to help them when they need it. Don't forget that kids and teens are listening, so they will notice how you, your circle (friends and loved ones), and the community talk about others' mental health.

Maintaining compassion and avoiding assumptions are key when supporting youth. Remember that painful or challenging experiences, such as trauma, often change the ways people think, feel, and act. In order to help kids and teens feel supported, we have to realize that mental health concerns show up in a lot of different ways.

If we criticize behaviors or situations that we don't understand or dislike, we can unintentionally send the message that we don't understand or dislike the kid and teens in our community. One way to avoid this is to maintain a trauma-informed lens. This means shifting your thinking from "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?" when seeing a behavior or situation you don't understand or dislike. This perspective shows empathy and reduces judgment, which can help children and teens feel more comfortable seeking support.





Find Help in Your Community

Once you've learned the basics, connect with resources in your community. Knowing what help is available will make it easier to support the children and teens in your life.

Start by looking into mental health services offered in your community, like those in local outpatient clinics, at school, medical settings, and online through telehealth. You can also help your loved ones and those in your community by learning about resources to help people find mental health services. Organizations like AR ConnectNow offer a [Care Guide](#), which is a service that helps people find mental health treatment options.



Also, think about what your community is missing. Consider the services that might be helpful in your community and learn if those exist near you.

- *Are there enough counselors at school?*
- *Are these free or affordable mental health services nearby?*

Finally, remember to watch for assumptions you might make about mental health and finding help. Not everyone finds support in the same way. Some prefer mental health treatments such as therapy or medication, while others rely on supports such as spiritual guidance or conversations with trusted elders. Some people benefit from a combination of supports.

The most important thing is that kids and teens find the help and support they need, and assumptions can prevent that. Respect others' choices and remember that there are many paths to healing.



Build Skills to Improve Mental Health and End the Silence

Normalizing the conversation about mental health is an important way to reduce stigma. If we only talk about mental health when someone has a concern or needs treatment, we send the message that mental health is only important when people are struggling. If kids and teens can talk about their mental health anytime, including when it's good or bad, they are more likely to share with the adults around them when they need to.



Set an Example

Model healthy conversation about mental health for youth by talking about your emotions, including the positive and negative ones (i.e., ***“I had a sad day today.”*** or ***“I feel excited to watch this movie with you.”***)

Talk about or let teens see the things you do to improve your mental health (i.e., ***exercise, listening to music, or spending time with loved ones***).

Normalize seeking help and reminding youth that mental health is just as important as physical health.

Just like physical health, there are skills you can learn and use that help improve your mental health, even when you feel good. You can learn and use these skills so that the kids and teens around you see them. The next page includes examples of a few skills you can practice. When you use these skills and share them with youth, you give them practical ways to improve mental health and wellbeing.

Finally, it's important to build your skillset in recognizing mental health stigma in conversations, movies, social media, and other settings. Don't be afraid to speak up when you hear harmful stereotypes but remember to be compassionate when challenging others. We are all on a journey at our own pace to end the silence.

Remember that the first and most important place to recognize mental health stigma is in your own words and actions.



Build Skills to Improve Mental Health and End the Silence

The following are a few examples of way to build skills to improve mental health. These skills only take a few minutes and can be used by children, teens, and adults. Try incorporating these skills into your daily routine and encourage youth in your life to practice them with you.



Belly Breathing

Slow, deep breaths can reduce anxiety and help people relax. Imagine your belly is a balloon. Take a long breath in and slowly inflate the balloon, hold the air in the balloon, then slowly let the air out. Remember to go slow to calm your body and mind.



5-4-3-2-1 Method

When you feel overwhelmed, use each of your five senses to help you feel grounded. Find the following and take a moment to observe them:

- Five things you can see
- Four things you can touch or feel (like your chair or your clothes).
- Three things you can hear (like music, a bird, or air conditioning).
- Two things you can smell (like food, air freshener).
- One thing you can taste (like your toothpaste from this morning).



Muscle Release and Tension

When you feel pressure or tension, take a second to release it. Start with your feet and legs, tensing all of the muscles you can. Then, release and your muscles slowly relax. Slowly repeat this process all the way from your toes to the top of your head.



Want to learn more?

AR ConnectNow has [videos to help you build skills](#) around mindfulness and improving mental health.



Take Action in Your Community

The best way to make change is to start with yourself. Take time to reflect on what you've learned and what you want to do differently.

Then, take a look at the planning guides in this toolkit to plan your next steps. Start by thinking about what you can do to end the silence. Then, consider how you can start talking to friends and loved ones. Finally, reflect on ways to end the silence and start talking in larger groups, like a club, spiritual group, or work meeting. If you found these resources helpful, remember to share them with others.

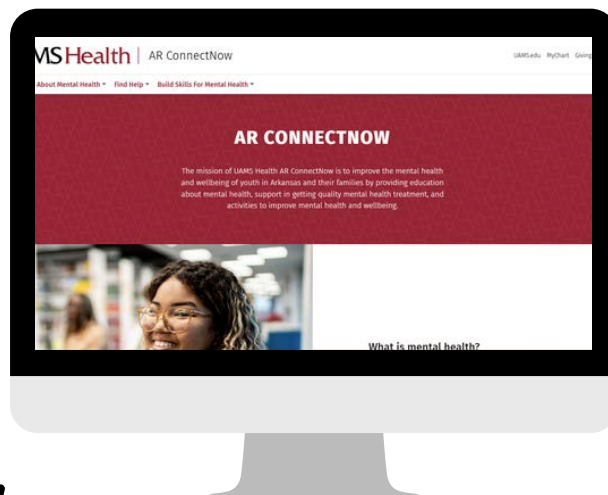
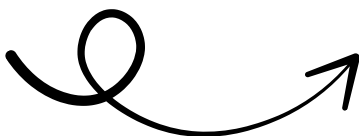
Conclusion

Adults have the power to make a big difference in the lives of youth. By ending the silence and starting the conversation about mental health, we can help youth build skills for positive mental health and give youth the confidence to seek help when they need it.

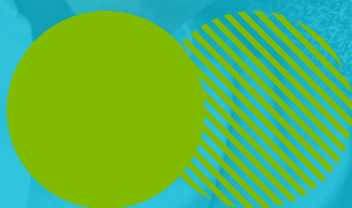
Remember that you're not alone in this work. AR ConnectNow and other resources are here to support you. Together, we can build stronger, healthier communities where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.

*Visit our website for
more information!*

[AR ConnectNow](#) has lots of information to help you learn about mental health, to find help locating mental health resources, and to build skills to improve mental health.



END THE SILENCE, START THE CONVERSATION



A Planning Guide to
Continue Talking after
our Conversation Toolkit



CONTENT CREATED BY:



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How to use this Planning Guide



Adults have the power to make a big difference in the lives of youth. By learning about mental health, offering support, and creating safe spaces, we can normalize conversations about mental health. This can help build skills for positive mental health, reduce stigma and give youth the confidence to seek help when they need it.

This guide will help you consider ways to first strengthen your own knowledge and skills. You can then share your knowledge with your friends and loved ones, or with larger groups. There is no one right way to start the conversation.

Consider each of these questions:



What can I do to end the silence?



How can I talk to my friends and loved ones?



How can my group start talking about mental health?

Choose the action item(s) from the following pages (or add your own) that feel like the right place to start for you. Be sure to check out our conversation toolkit for more ideas.



Example Goal

I want to learn more about depression because I know kids and teens who are impacted by it.
WHAT WHY
I will review a well-vetted source from a trusted site (like AR ConnectNow).
HOW WHERE (BE SPECIFIC)
I will do this in the next four weeks.
WHEN (BE SPECIFIC)



What can I do to End the Silence?

Adults have the power to make a big difference in the lives of youth. By learning about mental health, offering support, and creating safe spaces, we can normalize conversations about mental health. This can help build skills for positive mental health, reduce stigma and give youth the confidence to seek help when they need it.

1

Learn More about Mental Health and Stigma

- ☐ Learn more about mental health conditions that are common, like depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder.
- ☐ Research types of mental health treatment in your community.
- ☐ Think about the ways you talk about mental health and be sure to use supportive and respectful language.
- ☐ Take a trauma-informed approach. Shift your thinking from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” when seeing a behavior or situation you don’t understand or dislike.
- ☐ _____

2

Find Help in Your Community

- ☐ Look for existing mental health services in your community, using resources like AR ConnectNow.
- ☐ Consider the services that would be helpful in your community and learn where to go when you can’t find a needed resource (e.g., speaking with an AR ConnectNow care guide).
- ☐ Avoid assumptions about mental health treatment and remember that everyone finds different support that help them most (e.g., medication, spiritual guidance, trusted elders, therapy, etc.).
- ☐ _____

3

Build Skills to Improve Mental Health

- ☐ Practice talking about mental health, emotions, and treatment openly to normalize it.
- ☐ Learn skills that promote mental health and wellness and practice using those skills.
- ☐ Catch yourself using stigmatized language and practice using supportive words.
- ☐ Learn to identify stigmatizing language in society (e.g., movies, advertisements).
- ☐ _____



My Personal Plan

You may have selected a few strategies from our checklist on page 11 or added some of your own. Remember that you don't have to start them all at once. We suggest choosing one strategy that you want to start with and use the following questions to help you make a plan.



1) It's important to remember why you are committed to ending the silence about mental health. Why is this important to you?

2) Select the Strategy you want to start with from the steps above (pg. 11) and record it here:

3) Get more specific. Think about things like what, when, where, why, and how. Our resource guide on page 17 can help.

I want to _____ because _____ .
WHAT WHY

I will _____ from _____ .
HOW WHERE (BE SPECIFIC)

I will do this _____ .
WHEN (BE SPECIFIC)



How can I talk to my friends and loved ones?

After you have strengthened your own knowledge and skills, start thinking about how you can talk to your friends and loved ones. Don't forget that even one conversation with one person can make a difference. Choose the action item(s) from the list below (or add your own) that feel like the right place to start talking for you. Be sure to check out our conversation toolkit for more ideas.

1

Learn More about Mental Health and Stigma

- ☐ Create opportunities for others to learn about youth mental health concerns and treatment.
- ☐ Commit to using supportive language and sharing importance with others.
- ☐ Notice ways mental health is talked about in your circle.
- ☐ Model using a trauma-informed approach and checking assumptions.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2

Find Help in Your Community

- ☐ Share information about different types of mental health services.
- ☐ Tell others about existing resources they can use to help find services.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

3

Build Skills to Improve Mental Health

- ☐ Practice talking openly about mental health in your circle.
- ☐ Share resources about mental health in your circle to build skill in recognizing mental health stigma.
- ☐ Recognize and challenge mental health stigma with friends and loved ones.
- ☐ Learn and share mental health promotion and prevention skills.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____



My Plan for Talking with Friends and Loved Ones

You may have selected a few strategies from our checklist on page 13 or added some of your own. Remember that you don't have to start them all at once. Pick one strategy you want to start with and use the following questions to help you make a plan to start talking to your friends and loved ones:

1) It's important to remember why you are committed to ending the silence about mental health. Why is this important to you?

2) Select the Strategy you want to start with from the steps above (pg. 13) and record it here:

3) Get more specific. Think about things like what, when, where, why, and how. Our resource guide on page 17 can help.

I want to _____ because _____ .
WHAT WHY

I will _____ from _____ .
HOW WHERE (BE SPECIFIC)

I will do this _____ .
WHEN (BE SPECIFIC)



How can my group start talking about mental health?

After you have strengthened your own knowledge and skills and started talking with friends and loved ones, think about how you can start sharing and learning in larger groups (like clubs, spiritual groups, work meetings). Don't forget that even small groups can make a difference. Choose the action item(s) from the list below (or add your own) that feel like the right place for your group to start. Be sure to check out our conversation toolkit for more ideas.

1

Learn More about Mental Health and Stigma

- ☐ Create opportunities for our group or others to learn about youth mental health concerns and treatment.
- ☐ Commit to using supportive language and sharing importance with others.
- ☐ Evaluate ways mental health is talked about in your community.
- ☐ Maintain a trauma-informed stance and check assumptions in your group.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2

Find Help in Your Community

- ☐ Share information about different types of mental health services.
- ☐ Tell others about existing resources they can use to help find services.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

3

Build Skills to Improve Mental Health

- ☐ Practice talking openly about mental health in your circle.
- ☐ Share resources about mental health in your circle to build skill in recognizing mental health stigma.
- ☐ Work on recognizing and challenging stigma in the community.
- ☐ Learn and share mental health promotion and prevention skills.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____



Our Group Plan for Ending the Silence

Your group may have selected a few strategies from our checklist on page 15. Remember that you don't have to start them all at once. Pick one strategy you want to begin with and use the following questions to help your group make a plan:

1) It's important to remember why you are committed to ending the silence about mental health. Why is this important to you?

2) Select the Strategy you want to start with from the steps above (pg. 15) and record it here:

3) Get more specific. Think about things like what, when, where, why, and how. Our resource guide on page 17 can help.

I want to _____ because _____ .
WHAT WHY

I will _____ from _____ .
HOW WHERE (BE SPECIFIC)

I will do this _____ .
WHEN (BE SPECIFIC)



Resource Guide

Learn More about Mental Health and Stigma

Information about Common Mental Health Concerns

- Learn More Main Page: <https://tinyurl.com/mr3vvfea>

Information about Mental Health Treatment

- How to Find Help: <https://tinyurl.com/muz9py7t>
- Guide to Mental Health Services: <https://tinyurl.com/3dnxmf9w>
- What to Do If You are Concerned: <https://tinyurl.com/3ezu9xd9>

Using Supportive Language when Talking about Mental Health

- Fight Mental Health Stigma: <https://tinyurl.com/4pszpwee>
- Guide to Talking about Mental Health: <https://tinyurl.com/mcejzt7j>

Find Help in your Community

Information about Mental Health Services in Arkansas

- Find Help Home Page: <https://tinyurl.com/4fc4trua>

Ways to Find Services

- Care Guide Request Form: <https://tinyurl.com/25k3kcky>

Build Skills to Improve Mental Health and End the Silence

Talking about Mental Health

- How to Start a Conversation about Mental Health: <https://tinyurl.com/zjp832np>
- Guide to Talking about Mental Health with Your Child, Parent/Caregiver, or Friends: <https://tinyurl.com/mcejzt7j>

Learn to Recognize Stigma and Challenge Stigma

- Fight Mental Health Stigma: <https://tinyurl.com/4pszpwee>

Learn Skills that Promote Positive Mental Health

- Build Skills for Mental Health: <https://tinyurl.com/8skbnthp>

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