



MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA
IN VANDERBURGH COUNTY
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April 1, 2011

Dear Teachers,

May is Mental Health Awareness Month! The annual coloring and essay contest theme is "Beat Stress!" Junior Mental Health Association members designed our coloring sheet this year.

Please support Mental Health America of Vanderburgh County with our efforts to educate the youth in our community about mental health and wellness. As you well know, mental health is essential to everyone's overall health and well-being. Mental health problems are real and can affect all areas of a person's life, including school. The school systems are fortunate to have social work and psychology staff accessible to students and their families. With increased awareness and understanding of mental health, hope and recovery is attainable.

Enclosed are contest forms and a sample lesson plan. The contest deadline is Monday, April 18. Entries can be mailed to the MHA office or forwarded to the school secretary with pick-up at each school during that week (scheduled by contacting Jo at 812-426-2640). A winner in each category will be selected from the following grade divisions – Kindergarten-2nd grades (both coloring and essay); 3-5 grades (both coloring and essay); 6-8 grades (essay only), and 9-12 grades (essay only). Cash prizes will be awarded. The award ceremony will be held on Thursday, April 5 at 6:00 p.m. at the Children's Museum of Evansville (C Moe – 22 SE 5th St., Evansville, IN). Contest winners, teachers, and family members will be invited to this ceremony.

Thank you for your efforts in promoting wellness to achieve healthy students.

Sincerely,

Jo Gilreath
Executive Director-Mental Health America of Vanderburgh County
812-426-2640

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Learning Objectives for Mental Health Awareness – topic Stress

Goals: To help students identify with stress and how it affects them and others around them.

Objectives: Stress is a natural part of life. We all face challenges that test us and put our mental health at risk. In small doses, stress may be good for you when it gives you a burst of energy. But too much stress or stress that lasts for a long time can take its toll on your body.

Stress can be hard to define because it means different things to different people; however, it's clear that most stress is a *negative* feeling rather than a *positive* feeling.

Stress can make you feel run down, sad, nervous, angry or irritable with others. It can cause headaches, muscle tension, upset stomach, nausea, dizziness or feelings of despair, and may cause you to eat more or less than normal. It can also contribute to serious life-threatening diseases such as high blood pressure and heart disease.

Stress can be related to school work and tests, relationships with friends and family, multiple extra-curricular activities, illness in the family, economic restraints, local or national disasters, divorce, and military leave.

Finding healthy ways to manage stress can lower the risk of mental health and other health problems, and help you feel better overall.

- Relax your mind (listen to soothing music, read a book, do a quiet activity)
- Exercise (take a walk, ride a bike; exercise relieves tense muscles and improves your mood and sleep, and increases your energy and strength)
- Connect with others (Talk to a trusted friend, family member, counselor/teacher, school social worker, school nurse, or youth leader; get involved in a group activity at school or church)
- Get enough rest (getting enough sleep helps you recover from everyday stress)
- Help others (helping others builds relationships, self-esteem and gives you a sense of purpose and achievement)
- Know your limits (obligations and pressures are not always obvious – seek out help when feeling overwhelmed)
- Keep a journal (write down your thoughts to help you work through an issue; keep track of the good things that have happened to you too and be grateful)

Materials: Coloring page for Kindergarten through 5th grades; essay for both younger children Kindergarten through 5th grades and older children 6th-12th grades

Exercise: De-stress through Deep Breathing

This deep breathing exercise actually changes your brain's chemical balance to calm you down:

- i. Lie down or sit on the floor or in a chair.
- ii. Rest your hands on your stomach.
- iii. Slowly count to four and inhale through your nose. Feel your stomach rise. Hold it for a second.
- iv. Slowly count to four while you exhale through your mouth. To control how fast you exhale, purse your lips like you're going to whistle. Your stomach will slowly fall.
- v. Do this a few times.