Persona Building to Help Teens Master Mental Health

The Seattle Public Library

Teens

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Byline

Nourishing Minds

This activity allows teens to project their own emotions onto a fictional character instead of writing about themselves. This program will help teens develop a deeper understanding of diverse experiences by creating well-rounded fictional personas that consider various aspects of their lives, such as background, goals and pain

points.

This program idea is part of a comprehensive lesson plan meant to be co-designed with the teens at your library. Download the free Nourishing Minds toolkit to create a full plan of program "recipes" with goals and objectives to give teens the skills to manage their mental health and wellbeing. Learn more about Nourishing Minds.

Check out this free webinar on how to use Nourishing Minds.

Advanced Planning

Participants will collaboratively create a fictional character using various prompts to examine the character's background, personality traits, goals and challenges. The activity will be conducted using digital tools such as iPads, or physical materials like sticky notes or paper.

Teens will compare and discuss their personas, exploring the impact of external factors on their characters. Participants will contemplate the role their persona could play in cultivating a supportive environment for teen mental health, sharing their insights with the entire group using the rose, thorn, bud reflection method.

Through this co-design activity, participants will hone their skills in collaboration, creativity and empathy, which can be applied to their everyday lives.

1. Start by identifying goals. Create a session in which teens can start to acknowledge and process emotions:
    - A space where adults, teens and peers can learn about mental health.
    - Develop conversations to discover strategies that can help mental health through group activities and self-reflection.
2. Set clear objectives. At the end of this session, participants will be able to:.
    - Identify and recognize their own emotions.
    - Discuss other people's (or personas) emotions, and how they might handle situations.
3. Establish a framing question. For this program, the question is: *How can recognizing your own and others' emotions help with emotional regulation?*
4. Gather your materials and supplies. For this program, you'll need:
    1. Attendance list

2. Snacks
3. Name tags
4. Sharpies and dry-erase markers
5. Sheets of paper
6. Giant sticky notes
7. Small sticky notes

This is a sample session plan from the Nourishing Minds Toolkit using a Warm-up Card (Leave it at the Door), Topic Card (Emotional Identification), Co-design Card (Persona Building) and a Tools and Materials Card (Snacks) from the Nourishing Minds Toolkit. This exact sample is taken from page 41 of the Cookbook (available in the larger Toolkit download).

Budgeting

Snacks, if applicable.

Day-of-event Activity

The session flow should include as much detail as you feel necessary to help successfully facilitate the session. This includes:

- Time allocation for each section.
- Names of facilitators for each section, if there are multiple facilitators.
- Reminders for how to complete a given activity.
- Reflection questions for the teens after each activity, to help create a collaborative and inclusive Brave space.

Program Execution

The entire session is around two hours, including intro activities, the main activity and time for reflection.

Intro Activities (20 mins)

Welcome Warm-up (10 mins)

LEAVE IT AT THE DOOR

- Pass out sticky notes and a pen to each participant.
- Have everyone write something down that is weighing them down.
- Remind them that while in this session, they cannot change what is weighing on their mind, but they can momentarily take a “vacation” from these thoughts and concerns.
- Have them crumple up the paper and put it in a cardboard box.
- Remind them these are all anonymous and all will be recycled.

Question of the day (10 mins)

A simple question to build relationships: *What’s a recent activity you did that made you happy?*

Main activity (60 mins)

Once the introduction is completed, move into the main activity of Persona Building (60 minutes).

Have participants start creating their persona by providing a name for their fictional character and sketching out their headshot. Their persona should be between the ages of 13 and 18.

Next, have them fill out the following foundational components that make up a persona, spending around 10 minutes per section:

- *Bio:* surface level information introducing the persona (age, gender, pronouns, etc.)
- *Background:* learning a little bit more and establishing the persona (hometown, hobbies, languages)

- *Personality traits:* supplementary information that assists in understanding how the persona behaves in real life and relates to your space (behaviors, experiences, education, etc.)

- *Pain points:* capturing frustrations and any challenges they may be facing. What are they struggling with? What frustrates them?

- *Goals:* What motivates them?

Reflection: 3 Scenarios for Persona (35 mins)

• For each of the questions above consider:

- What emotions do you think this person would be feeling?

- How would this person navigate the scenario?

• How would your persona navigate social situations like attending prom or a dance?

• How do they maintain healthy relationships or making new friends?

• How do they cope with stress or challenges, like a lot of school assignments being due at the same time?

Advice

Empower teens through their feedback and create a more engaging and responsive program that meets their needs and interests.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group