

How can writing or drawing help you to understand your own feelings? Here are just a few ways.

- Writing helps you get a clearer picture of your inner world—what makes you happy or sad, confident or fearful, angry or content. Writing brings this world out where you can see it.
- If you write regularly, you will see patterns and notice things, such as what might bug you or what might help you. Writing helps you to know yourself a little better and that positively affects your emotional well-being.
- Writing or drawing about what makes you experience painful emotions like anger and stress can help lessen the intensity of these feelings and calm you.
- When you read your writing, you may recognize that a situation is not so bad or see a potential solution. Writing is a problem-solving tool. Through the creative process of writing, problems sometimes become “unlocked.”
- Writing or drawing about personal relationship problems, rather than stewing over them, might help you to understand everyone’s point of view. These tools might help you come up with a good solution to the conflict.
- Writing helps you to track growth over time. When things seem overwhelming, being able to look back on previous situations that you have been able to resolve is comforting and inspiring.

Name:

Read each statement below and discuss whether it is fact or fiction.

1. Mental health issues begin during adolescence.
2. Most mental health issues can improve with proper intervention.
3. Mental health problems are rare in Canada.
4. Mental illnesses are not real illnesses.
5. Most people with a mental health issue can pull themselves out of it.
6. Emotional problems are a sign of weakness.
7. Most people with mental illnesses have a tendency for violent behaviour.
8. Depression is not a mental illness.
9. People with mental health issues usually suffer from physical illness as well.
10. Most people with mental health issues have difficulty learning.

Read the information under each statement and compare it to your discussion. What did you already know? What new understandings do you have?

1. Mental health issues begin during adolescence.
Actually, mental health issues can begin early in childhood, and research says that most people who have a mental illness started to show signs before age 14.
2. Most mental health issues can improve with proper intervention.
This is a fact. With proper intervention, which can include therapy and medication, many individuals with mental health issues can function well and live fulfilling lives.
3. Mental health problems are rare in Canada.
This is not true. In fact, chances are you will know someone who has been affected by some form of mental illness.
4. Mental illnesses are not real illnesses.
There is a huge spectrum of mental health issues and they are as real as any other type of illness. Most require treatment, much like physical illnesses. They don't just "go away."
5. Most people with a mental health issue can pull themselves out of it.
This is not true. A mental health issue is as important as a physical health issue and people cannot just "pull themselves out of it."
6. Emotional problems are a sign of weakness.
Emotional problems can affect anyone at any time, regardless of age, gender, race, or ethnicity. They have nothing to do with being lazy or weak. In fact, taking care of yourself and reaching out for help when necessary are signs of strength, not weakness.
7. Most people with mental illnesses have a tendency for violent behaviour.
This is a stigma that is not true. People with mental illness are no more likely to be violent than anyone else.
8. Depression is not a mental illness.
Depression is one of the many mental illnesses that are part of the large spectrum of what constitutes mental illness. Depression can come in varying degrees and not all people who feel depressed have a mental illness.
9. People with mental health issues usually suffer from physical illness as well.
There is no evidence that people with mental illnesses are prone to physical illness more than other people.
10. Most people with mental health issues have difficulty learning.
This is untrue. People with mental illness vary in intelligence just like everybody else.

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

As part of our learning about literacy and mental health, we have been using a series titled *Well Aware*. It combines engaging texts written by award-winning Canadian authors with lessons that connect to strategies students can use on a daily basis to manage stressful situations.

One of these texts, titled *Red Carnation*, tells the true story of mental health advocate Alicia Raimundo when she was a 13-year-old girl. At that time, she was recovering in hospital from severe depression and a suicide attempt. The text, written in collaboration with author Deborah Ellis, describes her journey through the mental health system and the challenges and supports that she encountered while trying to find her way and manage her illness. Her story is one of help and hope. Alicia is now a university graduate who has worked to develop mental health programs and increase awareness across Canada and internationally.

As students work with the text, they explore issues of stigma that can interfere with understanding mental illness and prevent those in need from seeking help. They also examine ways to build resiliency and move forward from a difficult situation. The benefits of writing and creating to help us understand our thoughts and feelings are also discussed.

As caring adults, we all want to help our young people develop the skills necessary to be able to cope and thrive in all situations. This is why we continue to work to equip students with the tools they need to manage everyday stresses before they escalate into extreme situations. As teachers, we cannot diagnose or provide the appropriate care a child who is experiencing a mental health issue may need. What we can and will do, however, is open the doors to talking about mental health without shame, stigma, or judgment.

As part of our team, thank you for connecting with us concerning this important topic, and please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this work further.

Sincerely,