Lesson Plan:

Clinical Psychology: Beginning the Conversation

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Overview and Purpose:

This two day lesson will show students that mental illness is much more prominent in the world than we discuss, the stigma that surrounds mental illness/breaking it down, and students will begin to understand the symptoms of some of the disorders in the curriculum. The purpose of this lesson is for students to start thinking about the power of a label, the language we use, and what life may be like living with different disorders.

National Standards for High School Psychology Curricula (February 2022):

Standard Area (Unit Name):
Pillar: Mental and Physical Health
Domain: Disorders

Targeted Content Standard(s):
Perspectives of abnormal behavior
Categories of psychological disorders

Targeted Learning Target(s):
1.4. Explain how stigma relates to abnormal behavior
1.5. Explain the impact of psychological disorders on the individual, family, and society
2.1. Describe the classification of psychological disorders
2.3. Describe symptoms of psychological disorders

Day One:

Materials Needed: post-it notes, copies of Categories of Mental Disorders Worksheet

Setting the Stage:

I tell students upfront that I have two goals for them. As their AP Psychology teacher, I need them to understand the causes, symptoms, and treatments of a variety of mental illnesses. But as a person, I want them to understand what life is like for those who struggle and to work on breaking down the stigma.

Lesson:

1. Hand each student a post-it note and ask them to write how they are personally connected to Mental Illness in their life.
   NOTE: Students should know up front that you will be reading these aloud to their class and that they should NOT use any identifying information. I tell them to use phrasing like, “I…,” “My mom…,” “My friend…,” when writing and to be as specific as they are comfortable doing.

2. As students finish, have them bring their post-it note to the front and place it in a scrambled order on a desk. Once everyone has finished - and I have never had someone not be able to add to the conversation - read these aloud to the class. **NOTE:** I always participate too - this makes the activity more meaningful and authentic - and I will usually tell students what one is mine to help those who are nervous feel more comfortable with the whole thing.

3. We then discuss a multitude of things:
    a. How we all are personally connected and yet, we often do not discuss mental illness openly…why?
    b. The stigma attached to mental illness and why we think it may exist/what we can do to help break down this stigma.
    c. The power of a label…the difference between this woman **is** bipolar and this woman **has** bipolar disorder.
    d. What language should we use when discussing mental illness?
    e. How does our language play a role in the way society accepts (or does not) mental illness?
    f. This is only a sample of where you could take the conversation.

4. At this point introduce the *DSM-5*.
    a. Students will understand how the book is set up, that it is a fluid document, and why it is important.
    b. We will then start to categorize the disorders listed in the DSM-5 on the chart (attached here). Start by talking about the differences between deviant, distressful, dysfunctional so students have an understanding of what qualifies, per the definition, as a mental disorder.
    c. As a class, we list the categories and then go back and fill in the specific disorders under each category. I encourage them to figure out what disorders go under each category and share what they already know about the disorder as we go. By the end of class, they have a completed chart of the disorders they need to understand for AP Psychology purposes.

Day Two:

Materials: devices for students to use

Setting the Stage:
The focus of today's lesson is for students to understand what life is like for someone who has been diagnosed with the specific disorders they have already read about in their textbook.

Lesson:
1. I will remind my students that my goal for them as people is to understand life with the illnesses we are discussing.

2. Give students about 20 minutes to find a resource using the instructions below.
    a. Find a resource - video, infographic, article, website, etc… - that helps us understand what life is like for people with the mental illness you have been assigned. We will be sharing these out in class TODAY - so you will have about 20 minutes to find your resource. Make sure you have taken the time to review the material to make sure it is appropriate and as informational as possible.

- Social Anxiety Disorder
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Panic Disorder
- Phobia Disorder
- OCD
- PTSD
- Major Depressive Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder

3. After the resource is shared, the group should share out:
    a. Why did they pick this resource?
    b. What was most impactful in what was presented?
    c. How it helped them understand life with the disorder in a more meaningful way?
    d. I then open it up to class comments or questions.

    NOTE: You could give this as homework so that students have more time to find a resource and it would also give you time to preview what they are sharing. My students are so good at giving trigger warnings to each other, but I could see this being a concern.

4. As students are presenting their resources, others should be writing in their notebooks how this resource helped them understand each specific disorder. What did they take away from the resource that helped them understand life with this disorder in a more meaningful way?

Follow Up Idea:
Sue Frantz shared The Schizophrenia Oral History Project on an STP site a few years ago and I find this to be the most comprehensive way for my students to understand life with Schizophrenia. I give students 25-30 minutes to listen to a few stories on this site, do some reflecting (attached here) and then follow up with the same questions that lead our discussion on Day Two of this lesson.