HOLY ANGELS 2015-16

STOP THE STIGMA

A relatable, informative book all about our own mental wellness and mental illnesses.

Designed to inspire, empower, and stop stigma in its tracks!
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Welcome to our Stop the Stigma book!

Okay, here we go. At the start of writing this, I fear it is a daunting challenge. I love writing, but I am afraid of it. However, this book isn’t about the sprawling eloquence of our verse, but about our mental and emotional well-being: an underestimated and yet incredibly important aspect of our health. From quick, practical facts to more in-depth, personally charged articles, our very first Holy Angels Stop the Stigma Book aims to offer the reader solace: a feeling that they are not alone; and empowerment: the feeling that they can fuel change in their lives and those of others for the better. We always think of performing lofty, enviable feats, such as organizing fundraisers for an important cause or winning an award at a competition, as ones that become legendary, and ones that make people proud to know us. There is nothing wrong with achievement, but I can tell you truthfully that people you get to know will always think of you as you are in your “realest” moments: those times you crack a joke that gives everyone's day a positive boost, or when you offer to help them as they mope alone alphabetizing an enormous, stuffy book collection with a smile. It is vital to our well-being to know that our real selves are the kinds of people others want to meet and talk, work, laugh and share with; even when we feel pushed to the margins of the social world, there is always someone waiting there who values us. That someone may even be a fictional character we feel at home around, a parent, or God. Being real means allowing our true emotions to be expressed by us in whatever way we choose, not reigned in or restricted (given that the space you are in is an appropriate environment, I wouldn't recommend bursting into song at the dentist’s office, or crying profusely at a dinner party), and accepting our emotions as part of our own humanness.

That covers what we will talk about as we think about our own lives, but we are also here to discuss the stigma and misconception surrounding mental illnesses and those living with them. Stop the Stigma is a program that encourages us to recognize and help others see, too, that people with mental illnesses are people just like us, but they experience different thought processes that alter the way they live their daily lives. They are in no way “freaks”, nobody is. In order to become upstanding citizens and build an accepting society, we must rid ourselves of the stigma we attach to people, of all kinds, different from us, because we were all put upon this Earth for the same reason: to make it a better place.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I hope you realize something about yourself, and learn something new.
Mental illness refers to a wide range of mental health conditions. These conditions are disorders that affect mood, thinking and behaviour. Examples of mental illness include anxiety disorders, depression, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviours.

Many people have mental health concerns form time to time. But a mental health concern becomes a mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect the person's ability to function.

A mental illness can cause problems in the sufferer's daily life, such as at school or in work relationships. Sometimes, a person with a mental illness will need to spend time away from their school or work on leave to focus their thoughts and manage their mental health. In most cases, symptoms can be managed with a combination of medication and therapy through speaking with a certified mental health specialist or therapist.
People who have mental illnesses, according to various studies, often say that being stigmatized—marginalized, misunderstood feared—is a barrier for them to seek support and be more open about their feelings.
Depression is a mood disorder (serious, diagnosed issue) that can affect a person's thoughts, behavior and feelings. People with depression can feel sad, worthless, anxious, hopeless, guilty and helpless. They may lose interest in activities that were once fun and exciting; might lose their appetite or overeat; have problems concentrating, remembering details or making decisions, and might attempt or commit suicide. In the United States, it has been estimated that two thirds of people with depression do not actively try to receive treatment.

What is Depression?

By: Alicia K.
350 million:
Number of people worldwide who suffer from depression.

That’s 5% of the world’s population

“How are you?”


Fine.
THE BATTLE WITHIN

By: Hope A-F

The biggest part of our emotional well-being is "The Battle Within". Meaning, how you feel about yourself. You always need to think in a positive way. You need to be confident in yourself; this type of mentality contributes to positive mental health. This mental health also comes in the form of believing in yourself, which will allow us to have the determination, enthusiasm and confidence to reach our own success. Just be yourself, and show the world that you are confident in who you are.

When you are feeling down or need to talk to somebody, it may be hard to feel comfortable talking to an adult or friend because you feel like they will judge you or do not understand what you are experiencing. Sometimes we feel afraid in this way, but we have to remember that the people we talk to—parents, teachers and friends—care for us; and everybody that cares for us never wants to see us depressed, upset or stressed. They will try to help you find solutions and strategies to solve and manage any negative issues or emotions you are feeling. This support can make the battle within seem a little less challenging.

Just remember, you have the ability to make the world a better place!
The smallest voices in your head can make the smallest problem major...
And her grades dropped
   From a ninety eight to a ninety two
And she stopped eating
   From three helpings to just one
And she stopped sleeping
   From ten hours to only six
And these changes were subtle
   But still they were there
And she slowly fell apart
   Piece by tiny piece

And her grades plummeted
   She’s failing now
And she stopped eating
   She hasn’t had a bite
And she stopped sleeping
   She was lucky to get an hour
And these changes seemed sudden
   But they were there all along
And she fell apart a while ago
   And no one could put her back together
INFLUENCE

How what we see influences how we see things

According to Google, the twenty-first century's most enormous and instantaneous fount of knowledge for just about anything, the definition of influence is: the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behavior of someone or something; or the effect itself. Perhaps you've already guessed, but this article will be talking about the influence of different sources in our lives, and what this means for our mental wellness and attitudes towards others.

Possibly one of the most ever-present reminders of who and what we're supposed to pay attention to, and like, and imitate, is the mass media. This includes the usual— you've probably brainstormed this in class and discussed it at length— television, social networks, books, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, the Internet. I've grouped together TV shows, movies, books and social media to talk about the 'characters' and situations they present, and why we are so drawn to them. There is evidence that our brains are attracted to the movement and light of screens, as well as their other gripping properties, like the storylines and actors or writers that we admire. But we often feel that these characters— even if they are not the most charismatic but are mysterious, dark or reserved— embody something that we strive to be— whatever they are. But, simply put, these people don't exist. We have our own unique personalities, and imitating others is a sign that we don't accept ourselves. People appreciate us and our wonderful traits— our generosity, gregariousness, enthusiasm, and thoughtfulness— when we exhibit them as ourselves. Essentially, playing a character is only cool if you're doing it in performance. Being yourself is the coolest at all times.
Another effect the media has on us is its influence as to what appearances or styles are attractive. Glance toward any media outlet and you'll see people that are "beautiful"—people we are actually biologically wired to enjoy looking at because outward beauty is a useful survival trait—but why do we call them beautiful and not ourselves? This is an important question. Anyone asked to describe you would probably list several physical and personality traits that are flattering; and that is because they've seen you as yourself, and when you experience a person being real and natural, you see all of their features are coloured beautifully with energy and their uniqueness. That may seem odd and complicated, but honestly, it simply means that we shine in other people's eyes because they know us as different from everybody else they know, and different from every blank face that appears in the media. But when it comes to thinking about ourselves in a positive way, we often think it an impossible challenge (I know, for example, that people often say that I'm skinny, but I personally feel ginormous and would always like to lose 5 pounds). When we are surrounded by symmetrical, tall, lean bodies and faces, we feel compelled to earn the same status that they have, because they are praised for their desirable appearance, and we crave that same praise.

We even associate, in the words of a comment I read in a magazine that was originally posted on a blog (complicated, right?), being skinny and fitting the modern mold of "beauty" with being a "protagonist"—a somebody, in other words, that people are going to want to look at and know and will pay attention to. And we shouldn't think this way, as much as we feel like we should. I think that what makes you the protagonist (of your own life, not of your entire school/town/universe because popularity should never matter) is how you carry yourself, what you lend to situations that improve them, what you do to make other people feel better, and how you display your own clothing style and personality. When you focus on keeping these aspects of your life full of vitality, then you can essentially block out the harsh "be-like-us" rays emanating out of models' eyes in magazines. Maybe what truly allows you to like the way you look and who you are is knowing that you are different from everyone else. Your individuality is always something that, for you, can be a place to draw strength from.
Finally, there's the influence of peers in real life, our friends and classmates. Of course, there is the cliché of cliques, where we cannot oppose the social rules of diverse groups that are exclusive (jocks, theatre geeks, et cetera). But from them, and our real life equivalents (because we do not live in a high school movie), we come to know the feeling of conformity, and togetherness. How our group of friends thinks about other people and the world naturally influences us because of the time we spend with them. Sometimes, this influence can be positive: it can encourage us to see things from different perspectives and broaden our horizons, which is the most amazing part of having friends. But we must look out for some "warning signs" that our friends make us feel down or influence us in a negative way. Do they often talk about other people in ways that are considered unkind? Do they often discuss their appearances and compare them to media images or other people; or do they compare their abilities in a certain field (sports, singing, dance...) to other people in a condescending (arrogant, superior) or defeatist (pessimistic, apathetic) tone? If they do either of the first two, this influence might be convincing you to value appearance and ability as certain kinds of status or attention-getters. This, again, interferes with what should be our goal: to be "real," to allow our own personality to shine, and be the thoughtful, helpful person that people will value no matter what because of their contributions.

But, if your friends don't feel very confident, and often talk about how "bad" they are at something, there may be some things you can do to help them boost their confidence: through asking them more about their preferences, and doing activities that make them feel comfortable, and even just offering to listen to them. Be aware, though, that negative thought can also affect you and make you begin to experience those same self-doubting patterns. As long as you have your own personal mantras and reminders that keep you positive, you will be able to stay true to yourself, and remember that you should be confident and proud. The impact of our friends can make us want to conform: to act in a particular way different from our usual disposition, and the pressure to do so is enormous, because we all think we will be liked better if we do what is "cool". Honestly, we will always be remembered and admired best for what we did that stood apart; so the more you do that is completely original to you, and the more you help and inspire others through your words and actions, the better!
but how can we cope?

"Coping" means to handle a situation in an effective way. We have many stressors and sometimes even large problems in our lives that make us feel down, strained, or stressed. But, if you face these issues, it's likely that you have coping strategies too, even if you don't think about them. For example, if we have a disagreement with a friend at school, when we go home we might write about the situation in a journal so that we can get our feelings down, and then remove ourselves from the difficult situation by putting the journal down and walking away, giving ourselves time to clam down and think. Writing is definitely a great coping strategy. But sometimes, the most general, obvious ones don't work for everybody or at all times. Here is a list, taken from our own ideas and the Posse Project (more info about that later) of coping strategies. WE hope you can use them to help change your perspective or regain calm on a not-so-good day!
1) Listen to music or spend time creating "theme" playlists
2) Research a subject of interest to you on the internet (i.e., Greek mythology, how toys are made)
3) Reorganize or alphabetize your books/movies/CDs
4) Read old schoolwork, notes or journals from when you were small
5) Scribble on paper!
6) Read comments or forums on videos/articles/subjects you find interesting (and/or share your own thoughts)
7) Punch a pillow or punching bag
8) Play with modelling clay/Play-doh
9) Write about your feelings and then rip up the paper
10) Memorize a song you like or a passage from a book
11) Do a jigsaw puzzle (there are apps for this if you don't have a real one)
12) Find old toys and make up a story with them as actors
13) Randomly search for words in the dictionary and try to memorize their definitions or use them in conversation
14) Draw faces on old objects/clothes or fruit (if allowed)
15) Plan your dream bedroom
16) Do origami
17) Spend time with your pet
18) Use Halloween face paint to create different costumes/characters
19) Watch your favourite movie/TV show
20) "Choreograph" a dance to a song by yourself

For more coping strategies, please check out:

http://posseproject.tumblr.com/101%C2%20Coping%C2%20Strategies


There’s more to see

VIDEOS:
Taking in the Good:  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHEq8-tJJMk

Paint's (Jon Cozart's) strategies for getting out of bed and facing the day when you're feeling down (mature themes presented): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teR76oR5IK4

Depression to Expression Youtube Channel (great videos) Top 5 Causes of Depression/Anxiety: The Modern Mind https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRCioM0Q3GM

WEB RESOURCES:
Rookie Mag (mature language and themes, but a great community for teen girls; check out: "How Not to Care What Other People Think") rookiemag.com

Games to encourage self-esteem designed by McGill University: http://selfesteemgames.mcgill.ca/

The basics explained: http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/children_youth/introduction.php
Student Submission: The Mind is like a Puzzle

By: Megan A.
In Closing...

We made it!

I want to thank you, the reader, for travelling this road with us, the writers and idea-people behind this book. For me, as a writer and a teen, authoring some of these words has been an opportunity for solace. I hope you’ve learned a myriad things: what stigma is, how people with mental illnesses are similar to and different from those without, how to navigate some of the most daunting parts of being a young adult and developing your own unique self-image, and how to block out negative influences. If you take anything away from this or it gets you thinking about something you’ve never thought of before, we know we have accomplished our difficult, but well worth it, task. Again, let us express our gratitude to you for being a positive contributor, someone who was willing to learn and understand. Together we can overcome stigma, and we can also begin to hold conversations in which our emotional well-being is more important. By being open-minded and interested, you have, hopefully, formulated your own ideas about how we can make that happen.

This is our very first Stop the Stigma book, but it doesn't have to end here. There are always outlets and sources for your energy and interest. You can read and write about mental health and wellness on the Toronto Public Library teens website, and through various different online forums. Search and see what speaks to you! And, if you want to experience another Stop the Stigma book, be sure to make your voice heard next year! As an intermediate, many leadership opportunities are available to you. Spearheading this project (or making a similar book about any important cause) would be one of them.
I hope you always remember:

(1) That understanding and love are the greatest forces of positive change in this world.

(2) That you are capable and individual in your own way; and have the power to resist pressure to be someone you’re not.

This Stop The Stigma year for Holy Angels has been the best one, but that’s only because it’s the first. Let’s change the world, Angels!

With mega-tons of appreciation,

Sofia P., on behalf of the Holy Angels Student Council and Mr. Sandre, Mr. Scatozza and Mrs. Neri.