

The Top 10 Recommendations for Reducing the Stigma around Youth Mental Health

This list of recommendations was shared by youth from across northwest Michigan who participated in [*Through Our Eyes: A Photovoice Project on Stigma around Youth Mental Health*](#).

1. Make sure school wellness centers, counselors, and community-based mental health supports are approachable and integrated into daily routines - consider these supports an “opt-out” as opposed to an “opt-in” approach.
2. Increase youth-focused mental health education that is inclusive and destigmatizing - validate and normalize that we ALL have mental health needs that require attention, just like with our physical health.
3. Recognize that school should be a safe place and is sometimes the ONLY safe place students have. Ensure ALL school staff are equipped to recognize and address mental health needs in students.
4. Normalize the understanding that mental health challenges are just as unique as the people they impact. Notice, without judgment, if there are changes in someone’s attitude or behavior and let them know what you are seeing and that you are there to help.
5. Increase safe and supportive connections between school staff and students - Recognize that school can be a lot of pressure and normalize students’ need to take breaks.
6. Prioritize yourself! - Model positive mental health behaviors like taking a break when needed and normalize that self-care isn’t selfish.
7. Provide supportive and inclusive opportunities within your organization or community that allow people to come together to openly discuss mental health.
8. Establish designated spaces at school for youth to go to decompress and self-reflect when experiencing acute mental health challenges. Students need to find their “comfortable/safe” space at school, schools need to provide more of these.
9. Identify places within the community that youth typically gather and develop opportunities for youth to decompress and self-reflect in those places. Youth need more safe spaces in our communities to be able to “declutter” and self reflect.
10. Use social media as a tool for fostering open and inclusive education, communication, and connection around mental health - Normalize that often what we see on social media is not representative of someone’s whole self.



This is the work of the Reduce Stigma Against Youth Mental Health Action Team, one of the 10 Northwest CHIR's Behavioral Health Initiative Action Teams. Action Teams consist of cross sector partners willing and able to take action collectively and supported by the CHIR BBO staff. Learn more about the [CHIR](#) and the [Behavioral Health Initiative](#), and stay connected by [subscribing here](#).