Choose Your Response

Amanda Kracen, PhD
Pronouns: she/her/hers
Proud alum of IMSA class of 1994
Mental health ≠ happiness
Mental health

“State of well-being in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community.”

(WHO, 2014, revised to remove gendered language)
Life involves suffering

GEN Z FEELING STRESSED BY ISSUES IN THE NATIONAL NEWS

- Mass shootings
  - GEN Zs: 75%
  - Adults Overall: 62%

- Rise in suicide rates
  - GEN Zs: 62%
  - Adults Overall: 44%

- Climate change and global warming
  - GEN Zs: 58%
  - Adults Overall: 51%

- Separation and deportation of immigrant and migrant families
  - GEN Zs: 57%
  - Adults Overall: 45%

- Widespread sexual harassment and assault reports
  - GEN Zs: 53%
  - Adults Overall: 39%

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MENTAL HEALTH OF GEN Z

LEAST LIKELY TO SAY THEIR MENTAL HEALTH IS EXCELLENT OR VERY GOOD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>% Reporting Excellent or Very Good Mental Health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen Z</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Xers</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomers</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older Adults</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mental health challenges in teens

• Anxiety (32% of teens)
• Depression (13% of teens)
• Attention deficit-hyperactivity (9% of teens)
• Disordered eating (3% of teens)
• Others, of course

(NIMH, 2017)

Common...Treatable!
AMERICANS STRESSED ABOUT THE PRESENT BUT HOPEFUL FOR THE FUTURE

Considering the nation’s future causes significant stress

- 69%

The current political climate is a significant source of stress

- 62%

This is the lowest point in the nation’s history they can remember

- 56%

Disagree our country is on the path to being stronger than ever

- 61%

Feel hopeful about their future

- 75%

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Choose your response

“Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

VIKTOR FRANKL

MAN’S SEARCH FOR MEANING

VIKTOR E. FRANKL

WITH A NEW FOREWORD BY HAROLD S. KUSHNER

MORE THAN 12 MILLION COPIES IN PRINT WORLDWIDE
Choose your response

1. Expectations
2. Resilience
3. Meaning
1. Expectations
Clarify expectations

• If you are focused on only expecting happiness, you will be disappointed.

• Be willing to experience happiness, connection, joy, love, AND stress, sadness, loneliness, fear, etc.
Willingness

• To notice and acknowledge ALL emotions and experiences, not just the good ones

• Holding a cactus
Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT)

“The goal of ACT is to create a rich and meaningful life, while accepting the pain that inevitably goes with it.”

(Harris, 2006)
Mental health

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(WHO, 2014, revised to remove gendered language)

- These require you to be active!
- You deserve support.
2. Resilience
Basics that help

• HALT
  • Hungry
  • Angry
  • Lonely
  • Tired

Also need physical and psychological safety
Resilience

Ronald Epstein, M.D.

Awakening to notice life

( Epstein, 2017)
Flexibility
Learning resilience & coping

• What did I do at 16?

• What have I learned to do?
Evidence-based coping strategies

• Be active
• Sleep
• Deep breath
• Be self-compassionate
Choose your response

• What do you do already?  
• What is 1 strategy you could learn/add/do more?
3. Meaning

“an erosion of the soul”
(Maslach, 2003)
Personal mission statement

- What do I really want out of life?
- What do I want my life to stand for?
- What am I uniquely put on earth to achieve?
- What do I believe my purpose or mission is in life?

(Friesen, 2016)
1. I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.
2. I wish I hadn’t worked so hard.
3. I wish I’d had the courage to express my feelings.
4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
5. I wish that I had let myself be happier.
Examples

MALALA YOUSAFZAI, ACTIVIST/NOBEL PRIZE WINNER

“I want to serve the people. And I want every girl, every child to be educated.”

MY MISSION IN LIFE IS NOT MERELY TO SURVIVE, BUT TO THRIVE; AND TO DO SO WITH SOME PASSION, SOME COMPASSION, SOME HUMOR, AND SOME STYLE.

Maya Angelou
Your homework – Today!

• Write a mission statement
• 1-2 sentences
• Short and sweet
Mental health ≠ happiness
The easy life?
Choose Your Response

1. Expect challenges
2. Build resilience
3. Clarify your meaning
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