

Mythbusting Depression and Anxiety

Instructions

The group leader will read out loud a statement about depression and/or anxiety, and will indicate an invisible line in the middle of the room. If you believe the statement to be true, move to the right side of the line. If you believe the statement to be false, move to the left side of the line. Once everyone has voted by moving to opposite sides of the line, the group leader will read the answer before moving on to the next true or false statement.

Note: Feel free to adapt to have students do hand gestures (or similar) for true vs false, if this is more acceptable with your students.

1. **Statement:** Most teenagers who struggle with depression or anxiety get treatment.
Answer: False
 - We know that actually up to 80% of people in need of mental health services never get treatment¹. Even further, many teens “fake” it very well for a long time and no one ever even knows that they are struggling.

2. **Statement:** Depression and anxiety are partially caused by our biology.
Answer: True
 - Both biology and life experience play a part in whether or not individuals develop depression or anxiety. People without a family history of depression or anxiety develop it, especially after stressful life events, but many people also have a family history/genetic predisposition for depression or anxiety.

3. **Statement:** Our feelings of anxiety are tied to our fight-or-flight system.
Answer: True
 - We are wired to react to danger or stress very quickly and without thinking. That’s our fight or flight system. When faced with a stressor, we get an upset stomach, racing heart, shortening our breath, etc., to prepare us to move to safety. This is true of all animals. With humans, however, sometimes this reaction can go a little too far and get stuck in the “on” position, where we feel nervous even without a stressor or danger.

4. **Statement:** If you have depression or anxiety, it’s your fault.
Answer: False
 - Absolutely not! That’d be like telling people that having asthma or diabetes or a difficult time reading is their fault! Everyone’s brains and life experiences are unique and it is never someone’s fault to have depression or anxiety. If you look at pictures of anxious brains or depressed brains, you’ll see that these brains are truly operating differently.

5. **Statement:** If your life is super stressful, it's pointless to try to feel better.

Answer: False

- That's what you'll see in this group. Even if you can't change all of the stressful things about your life, you don't have to turn EVERYTHING around to feel better. Try just taking very small steps and, together, they will make a big difference. If you want a corny little quote to go with this, "What is the ocean but little drops?"

6. **Statement:** Depression is the same thing as being really sad, like after someone dies.

Answer: False

- Depression has many symptoms and while sadness CAN be one of them, it doesn't even have to be. Depressed people can feel just gray and detached, like there is no color or life in anything, or they may seem very irritable – sadness is not a pre-requisite. At the same time and on the other hand, everyone feels sadness. Sadness is an emotion and is NOT the same thing as depression, which is an illness.

7. **Statement:** Approximately 25% of teens struggle with an anxiety disorder².

Answer: True

8. **Statement:** 5% of teens have depression.

Answer: False

- We know that up to 20% of teens experience depression before they reach adulthood, while 10-15% of teens are experiencing depression right now³.

9. **Statement:** When we talk about anxiety, we are referring to worry thoughts AND physical symptoms.

Answer: True

- Anxiety can cause racing thoughts, "what ifs," self-doubt, and all kinds of challenging thoughts. People with anxiety also experience physical symptoms, including a racing heart, stomach aches/headaches, muscle tension, fast breathing, sweating, shaking, and fidgeting.

10. **Statement:** Anxiety will never get better. Once you have it, you'll have it for life.

Answer: That's a tricky one... It's not really true or false (TRICK QUESTION!)

- On the one hand, it's important to remember that all humans experience anxiety at one time or another because anxiety is a basic emotion and part of our fight-or-flight response. But on the other hand, anxiety that interferes in our lives and is beyond what is typical is highly responsive to treatment, especially with the types of tools we will be learning in this group!

11. **Statement:** Depression is treatable.

Answer: True

- The majority of people with depression get better with treatment. We know that CBT is a very helpful treatment. Medication can be helpful as well!

12. Statement: Suicidal thinking is a symptom of depression.

Answer: True

- Just like having little energy, being irritable, or losing your appetite can be part of depression, thinking about death or even about killing yourself can also be a part of depression. If this is a symptom you experience, it is very important to be open with trusted adults about your suicidal thinking. And if someone doesn't give you a helpful response, tell someone else.

13. Statement: If you've "always been this way" (anxious or depressed), things aren't likely to improve.

Answer: False

- Actually, as teenagers you are at the perfect age to learn the skills necessary to manage your thoughts and emotions, and choose adaptive behaviors and help yourself feel better. Over and over and OVER we have seen people who thought things would never get better find a way to improve things for themselves.

14. Statement: I'm the only one I know who struggles with depression, anxiety, reacting to my emotions, or managing stress.

Answer: Obviously False

- Otherwise how would we all be here?

15. Statement: I'm going to learn some good skills in this group.

Answer: Obviously True!

¹Child Mind Institute. (2016). 2016 Children's Mental Health Report. Retrieved from: <http://childmind.org/report/2016-childrens-mental-health-report/>.

²National Institute of Mental Health. (2016). Any Anxiety Disorder Among Children. Retrieved from: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-anxiety-disorder-among-children.shtml>.

³National Institute of Mental Health. (2016). Major Depression Among Adolescents. Retrieved from: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/major-depression-among-adolescents.shtml>.