



Minding Your Mind – Changing Minds: Stories Over Stigma Research Study | January 5, 2026

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports there is a persistent mental health crisis among adolescents in the United States. Notably, one in five teens will experience a mental health challenge this year, but less than 20% of them will seek treatment. According to that report, more than 40% of students reported persistent sadness or hopelessness and nearly one-third experienced poor mental health. Conversely, students who feel more connected to others are less likely to experience feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Studies also show that open conversation about mental health, feelings of connectedness, and available support systems can help mitigate the effects of the ongoing youth mental health crisis. It is evident that youth are struggling with mental health, yet stigma and shame are among the greatest barriers to treatment for acute or chronic mental health challenges. By decreasing stigma related to mental health and increasing help seeking behaviors, youth are more likely to seek mental health support.

Individuals from minoritized groups are more likely to report stigma related to mental illness, which can increase hopelessness and decrease help-seeking behaviors. Addressing stigma is an important step towards dismantling social and structural barriers to equitable mental health. Universal school-based social and emotional learning interventions have been shown to improve mental wellness, attitudes, and behaviors among students. However, additional research on social emotional learning programs is needed to determine best approaches. ***Minding Your Mind's Changing Minds: Stories Over Stigma*** features professionally-trained young adults talking to students about their lived experiences with mental health challenges in a way that reduces negative stereotypes about people with mental health conditions. The program is conducted at schools throughout the greater Philadelphia region and beyond.

Current Study: To assist in evaluating the effectiveness of the program, MYM partnered with behavioral science researchers at Temple University to assess mental health stigma and help seeking attitudes among a diverse sample of adolescents in the greater Philadelphia region. High schools were recruited in 2024 and 2025 to host the MYM program and invited to include research surveys. Six high schools agreed to participate in the study. Students were asked to complete the pre-survey approximately two weeks before the MYM program. The post-survey was administered immediately following the in-school MYM program. Table 1 indicates the demographic characteristics of the 273 participant responses for this study. The research methods were reviewed and approved by an institutional review board, and all participants reviewed informed consent/assent forms before agreeing to complete the study surveys.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics						
	All Responses (N = 273)		Pre-Test (n = 134)		Post-Test (n = 139)	
Age (M/SD)	15.3	1.0	15.3	1.0	15.3	1.0
Gender (n/%)						
Female	103	38%	52	39%	51	37%
Male	166	61%	80	60%	86	62%
Nonbinary	3	1%	1	1%	2	1%
Race (n/%)						
Black/African American	62	23%	25	19%	37	27%
White/Caucasian	87	32%	40	30%	47	34%
Hispanic	60	22%	32	24%	28	20%
Asian	41	15%	21	16%	20	14%
Multiple/Other	23	8%	16	11%	7	5%

Participants in this study completed the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Counseling Help Scale (ATSPCH)¹¹ and the Attribution Questionnaire (AQ-9).¹² The ATSPCH consists of 10 items and is a valid and reliable instrument for measuring attitudes towards seeking help.



Participants respond using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from “disagree” to “agree.” Example items include: “I would want to get psychological help if I were worried or upset for a long period of time” and “I might want to have psychological counseling in the future.” The AQ-9 is a valid and reliable instrument for assessing mental health stigma. It provides a brief scenario: Charlie is a new student in your class. Before Charlie’s first day, your teacher explained that Charlie is mentally ill and is transferring from a special school.” Participants report how much they agree or disagree with nine statements using a Likert-type scale ranging from “not at all” to “very much.” Sample items include: “I will try to stay away from the new student” or “I would help the new student.” Data were collected using a secure online survey program. Between-subjects differences were examined using statistical analyses (*t*-test) to detect differences in mean scores across time. Statistical significance was set at the level of $p < .05$ for all analyses, indicating that the results are truly different and not due to random chance.

Study Findings: Following the MYM presentation, adolescents held more *positive attitudes* towards seeking professional mental health treatment. Specifically, the mean score on this scale increased from 25.6 to 27.0, a difference that was statistically significant (see Table 2). Regarding mental health stigma, adolescents in this study were significantly more likely to feel *sympathy* for a peer with a mental health diagnosis. Adolescents were also significantly more likely to want to *help* a peer with a mental health diagnosis (see Table 2). The students were also less likely to report avoidance of a peer with mental health symptoms, a difference that trended towards significance. All other indicators of mental health stigma were improved following the MYM program, though not to a level that achieved statistical significance.

The results of this research study demonstrate positive support for Minding Your Mind’s *Changing Minds: Stories Over Stigma* program. Following this mental health lived experience education presentation, adolescent students held more positive attitudes towards seeking mental health care and viewed others’ mental health experience with less stigma.

Table 2. Mental Health Stigma and Help Seeking Attitudes				
	Pre-Test (<i>n</i> = 134)	Post-Test (<i>n</i> = 137)	Mean Difference	
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help (ATSPPH)				
	25.6 (4.1)	27.0 (4.3)	-2.71	.007
Stigma/Attribution Questionnaire				
Danger	3.9 (2.4)	3.3 (2.5)	1.92	.056
Sympathy	4.8 (2.3)	5.6 (2.3)	-2.98	.003
Segregation	2.2 (1.7)	2.1 (1.9)	0.18	.855
Avoidance	3.6 (2.2)	3.0 (2.1)	1.94	.053
Blame	4.9 (3.3)	4.6 (3.3)	0.56	.575
Angry	1.9 (1.4)	1.7 (1.6)	1.14	.257
Help	6.0 (2.3)	6.6 (2.1)	-2.22	.027
Fear	2.2 (1.7)	2.1 (1.8)	0.65	.513
I would talk to parents about own mental health concerns	5.9 (2.4)	6.0 (2.7)	-0.31	.758

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