

THE MIND INSIDE

A SERIES ON MENTAL HEALTH

AN I ♥ PUBLIC SCHOOLSTM FILM

SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE



STREAM ONLINE FREE AT iloveps.org/TMI

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Thank you for your interest in hosting a screening of **The Mind Inside** series.

Sharing this content is vital to creating a better understanding of how mental health in our country impacts classrooms. Thank you for your support and assistance in spreading the message.

We've created this guide for you to use as a resource while planning your screening. If you need help along the way, we're here for you. Email team@nelovesps.org with your questions or feedback.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Over the last few years, we have spent time in counselors' offices, listened to stories of students and teachers, and interviewed local and national experts. What we've learned is that mental health challenges are faced by students all over the country, in every school, everywhere.

We created *The Mind Inside* series to explore what students are struggling with today, what social, emotional, and behavioral resources are available, and what schools and their communities are developing as short- and long-term solutions.

This topic is complicated and deeply personal. Throughout production, I found myself being much more understanding and empathetic the more I listened to these stories. I hope this film series does the same for you, too.

We hope you'll watch each episode, share the stories, and have serious conversations with family and friends about what we all need to do to help support our kids.

On behalf of Nebraska Loves Public Schools, I'm proud to share this film series with the world and I can't thank the students and staff enough for their courage and collaboration in allowing us to tell these stories.

We are grateful for your support.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sally Nelson Barrett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

SALLY NELLSON BARRETT, DIRECTOR
NEBRASKA LOVES PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ABOUT US

From short films about the positive happenings in today's classroom to feature films about societal issues impacting students and families, Nebraska Loves Public Schools documents the stories of public schools across Nebraska. View our collection of more than 100 films on topics from poverty to community investment, career education and more at iloveps.org.

FILM SYNOPSIS

The Mind Inside, an I Love Public Schools docuseries, explores the landscape of mental health issues in Nebraska schools.

Episode One lays the foundation for the series, establishing what life looks like in public schools today and how mental health impacts the classroom. The episode takes place in a middle school where staff tackle a whole host of challenges students bring to school with them, from trauma to peer frustrations, anxiety and depression, and more. Watch stories from students, hear from school leaders, and understand the growing need for compassion, empathy, and support for students.

Episode Two explores the complicated world of social media – its influence on young minds and its impact on students' mental health. Hear directly from students, teachers, and medical experts to understand how the ever-changing social landscape affects what happens in the classroom today. This episode illustrates the nuances of the digital and real worlds of today's students, where the development of the adolescent brain and vulnerabilities of growing up are compounded by daily, persistent online interactions.

Episode Three follows the journey of two school heroes who take on the often daunting task of connecting vulnerable children and families with the necessary support to keep their kids engaged in school. With earnest accounts from students and guardians, the stories presented in this episode uncover how inherited trauma, generational poverty, drug abuse, neglect, and other home dynamics complicate the path to academic success. See how one school provides refuge for families, intervenes to protect the welfare of students, and navigates through systems of support to offer hope for the future.

Future episodes will focus on staff mental health and wellness, as well as solutions that are currently working in Nebraska's schools.

WHY THIS FILM?

The goal of this series is to create awareness around mental health and to encourage understanding, empathy, and support for students.

Nebraska's public schools currently serve close to 90 percent of all children in the state, and the schools often serve as an important resource for families. Our hope is to continue the dialogue about why mental health support is needed across the state and how to become more engaged in public education.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

ACES – Adverse Childhood Experiences, which are categorized into three categories.¹

1. Abuse: emotional, physical, sexual abuse
2. Household Dysfunctions: domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness in household, parental separation or divorce, criminal household member
3. Neglect: emotional or physical neglect

Mental Health – a continuum or concept of one's current social-emotional wellbeing

Mental Illness – refers to a range of mental health conditions or disorders

Trauma-Informed Language – a technique used to engage students that acknowledges past and current experiences with trauma, with the belief that educators can break the cycle of trauma, prevent re-traumatization, and engage a child in learning and finding success in school.

Prefrontal cortex – the region of the brain used for rational thinking

Amygdala – the part of the brain used for processing emotions

Ventral striatum – part of the brain used for decision making and reward-related behavior

Student Services Coordinator - a dedicated staff member who contributes to the quality of students' learning experience and their academic success, leading the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, and advocating for students and families.

School Resource Officer (SRO) - a law enforcement officer who helps train and educate school staff members and students, develop safety plans and serve as a liaison between schools and outside agencies. Source: U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS).

Health and Human Services (HHS) - a government agency intended to enhance the health and well-being of Americans, by providing services and by fostering sound, sustained advances in the sciences underlying medicine, public health, and social services.

Child Protective Services (CPS) - social services agency responsible for the assessment, investigation and intervention regarding cases of child abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse.

Alternative Response - A term used to identify reports with families with less severe reports of child abuse and/or neglect that are accepted for assessment. These reports do not focus on an abuse/neglect investigation, but instead focus on connecting families with supports and services needed to enhance the ability to keep children safe and healthy.

¹ CDC-Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study; Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults; Felitti, Vincent J et al. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, Volume 14, Issue 4, 245-258; graphic provided at the end of the document

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

Before the panel discussion:

- welcome everyone and thank them for coming
- introduce yourself and thank partners, speakers, and others involved
- introduce the panelists by sharing their name, affiliation, and role within the school/community

The best conversations begin with questions that inspire thought and reflections from the audience. Often, one or two good questions can launch a dynamic dialogue, which can become a springboard for brainstorming and planning actionable next-steps. Typically, we open the discussion with one or two panel questions, then organically ask the audience to engage in a Q&A session. We provide panelist questions to encourage dialogue, as our films may evoke strong emotions for some audience members.

Please have empathy and maintain a kind balance between debate and dialogue, exchanging ideas to learn from one another and to find ways to collaborate.

Questions asked on the panel following the film often include, but aren't limited to, the following:

- What resonated with you as you watched the film? *Describe a moment in the film that really sticks with you – maybe it was inspiring or made you connect. Please share if any particular part of the film was surprising to you.*
- Did anything in the film reflect what you've seen in your own community?
- What are the biggest myths about mental health issues in your area?
- What do you wish people knew about your students who struggle with mental health?

Episode One specific

- Building relationships is one of the central themes in the film. Describe what this looks like in your school community.
- Seeing staff members like Eric and Carey take on so many difficult stories from students, how do you take care of yourselves?
- Educators: What does trauma training look like in your building? What are the ratios of social workers and counselors to students in your school?
- How can we all better support students and families in our community?

Episode Two specific

- With 95% of students having access to a smartphone, social media has contributed to increased behavioral challenges in the classroom. Compare and contrast the experiences of students today to your own.

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DISCUSSION GUIDELINES CON'T

- How might we empower students to adapt a balance of social media use? Additionally, in what ways can we help them better understand the importance of appropriate usage?
- What positive programs and outlets exist for students to build confidence in themselves and empathy for their peers? What services exist to help students develop strong digital citizenship?
- What are the supportive mental health resources that exist in your community for students in need? How are these services encouraged and promoted? How might they be even more effective?
- Educators: With the stigma and opportunity associated with social media, how do you approach keeping students safe and focused in a “distraction-free” classroom while keeping up with technology?
- How can we all better support students and families in our community?
- What resources are available for students who need to talk to someone for themselves or are concerned about a friend?
- How would a student or family know what services are available at school?
- Does your community or school provide any suicide prevention training or offer QPR (question-persuade- refer training) training for families, students, and staff?
- How can parents and schools work together to support children’s mental health?
- How can parents and schools work together to provide guidance around social media and technology use?
- Does your school have a system like Gaggle that monitors social media or other online work, like Google docs, while students are on the school’s internet?
- What does the school provide in the area of social and emotional health curriculum?

Episode Three specific

How would you describe the feeling you were left with once the film had ended? Would you recommend this episode to a friend?

- What information did you learn that is new and/or surprising to you about schools and their relationship with the child welfare system? Where is the gap?
- Which of the four student stories impacted you the most? Discuss.

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- In what ways can you provide assistance to students in need? Who can you contact to understand the issues happening in your school community – the school services, homeless outreach, or mentorship coordinator? Does your school have a pantry or other support measures?
- Schools utilize School Resource Officers in various ways. Officer Johnson approaches many of the student issues as a public health problem, rather than a criminal justice problem. What difference does this make?
- What assumptions were made about families experiencing poverty? How were they challenged? Use examples from the film.
- Do you know what resources are available for students in your local school? What Alternative Response procedures exist to support schools and build a bridge between services.
- In light of the pandemic, in what ways do you anticipate issues in the home becoming more problematic at school?

STATISTICS FROM THE FILM

Episode Two

- 95% of teens have access to smartphones.¹
- 45% of teens say they are online almost constantly.¹
- 45% of U.S. teens say social media makes them feel overwhelmed by drama.¹
- 43% of U.S. teens say social media makes them feel pressured to only post content that makes them look good.¹
- 37% of U.S. teens say social media makes them feel pressure to post content that will get lots of likes/comments.¹
- 26% of U.S. teens say social media makes them feel worse about their own life.¹
- 70% of teens say that anxiety and depression are a major problem among people their age.²
- By the time girls are seniors in high school, 2 in 3 have been asked to send a sexually explicit photo to another person.³
- While both boys and girls send naked images, boys are nearly four times as likely to pressure girls to send sexts as girls are to pressure boys to do so.³

Episode Three

- The majority of Nebraska counties (**88 of 93**) face a significant shortage of health professionals⁴
- Schools are the number one reporting source for Child Abuse and Neglect Reports to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services⁵
- As of 2019, Nebraska had **2,910** Child, Family, and School Social workers and **329,290** students (2020)⁴
- Professional standards recommend at least one counselor and one social worker for every **250** students.
In Nebraska: the student to social worker ratio is **3,350 : 1**⁶
the student to counselor ratio is **347 : 1**⁶
- The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of **500-700** students per school psychologist.
In Nebraska: the student to school psychologist ratio is **1,164 : 1**⁶

¹ Pew Research Center, MAY 31, 2018
Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018

²https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/wpcontent/uploads/sites/3/2019/02/Pew-Research-Center_Teens-report-topline_final.pdf

³Hinkelman, L. (2017).

The Girls' Index: New insights into the complex world of today's girls.
Columbus, OH: Ruling Our eXperiences, Inc

⁴ U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

⁵Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services / Child Abuse and Neglect Annual Data, 2018

⁶ACLU

TAKE ACTION

We need your help to spread the word. Here are some ways you can help.

- Share the film online - link to **iloveps.org/TMI** and use the hashtag #ilovepublicschools
- Host a virtual screening in your home or organization
- Ask questions, listen to ideas, and be responsive when the topic of mental health comes up; treat the topic and those involved with respect, compassion, and empathy
- Educate others about mental health and the role schools play
- Contact your school about resources available in your area; a list of resources is available online at **iloveps.org/TMI**
- Get involved with community partners supporting your school and discover how you can become a resource, mentor, or supporter of students in your area
- Recommend any people or organizations you feel should see this film and participate in this conversation (send recommendations to team@nelovesps.org)
- Attend future film screenings and small group discussions