

**Breaking the Silence: Teacher Evaluations of the
NAMI-New York State
School Education Program on Mental Illness
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Executive Summary

The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill – New York State (NAMI-NYS) has developed an education program, entitled “Breaking the Silence,” aimed at teaching the next generation about mental illness. This program consists of lesson plan packages for elementary school, middle school, and high school classes. These packages include posters, games, activities, and discussion topics that teachers can use in their classrooms to educate students about the typically neglected topic of mental illness.

In an initial attempt to empirically evaluate the success of the program, feedback from teachers regarding “Breaking the Silence,” taken from completed evaluation forms collected by NAMI-NYS, was compiled, organized, and analyzed. Several important areas were examined. First, the number of teachers who had used the program was noted, along with their reported intent to use the materials again in the future. Next, teacher reports of the perceived effectiveness of the materials in dispelling myths and stereotypes about mental illness and in educating students about serious mental illness were examined. Lastly, the appraisal of individual program components was reviewed. The following is a summary of the overall findings:

- A total of 95 evaluation forms were returned to NAMI-NYS. Of these, 11 were from upper elementary teachers, 32 from middle school teachers, 41 from high

school teachers, and 11 from some combination of these three previous levels. For example, they may have used elementary school and high school materials with their middle school classes or they may have used the curriculum with both sixth (elementary) and seventh (middle school) grade children.

- In terms of usage, 72 teachers (76%) reported using the “Breaking the Silence” materials. This consisted of 10 upper elementary teachers, 20 junior high teachers, 35 high school teachers, and 7 teachers who had used some combination of the three levels. An additional 20 teachers (21%) indicated that they had not yet used the materials, but that they intended to in the future. The remaining 3 teachers (3%) did not indicate whether they had used the materials nor their intent to use them in the future.
- Of the teachers who used the program, 94% (68 teachers) indicated that they would use the materials again. Of the remaining 6%, 2 teachers reported that they would possibly use the materials again and 2 teachers made no indication as to whether they would use the materials again.
- When asked to rate how effective the materials were in dispelling myths and stereotypes about mental illness, the mean response was 4.44 (N=71) on a 5-point scale where 1 indicated “not at all effective” and 5 indicated “very effective.”
- When asked to rate how effective the materials were in educating students about serious mental illness, the mean response was 4.37 (N=43) on a 5-point scale where 1 indicated “not at all effective” and 5 indicated “very effective”.
- Most evaluation questionnaires (67) provided opportunities to rate the usefulness of specific program components on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “not useful” and 5

being “very useful” (again, with no word labels provided for intermediate scores). The specific components listed on the evaluation forms varied somewhat, however. Five components--Lesson Plans, Suggested Activities, Use the Right Words, Recommended Material, and Recommended Resource Organizations--were listed on all 67 forms requesting ratings of specific components. Games & Puzzles were included in 57, Poster in 52. Seventeen teachers completed a version of the evaluation that listed Schizophrenia Activity, Normal Ups and Downs of Adolescence, True/False Test, and Warning Signs components (which were available only in the high school curriculum). Ten forms included ratings for The Brain Game (available only for junior high students), and 8 allowed for ratings of the Phobias Worksheet (used only for elementary schools).

- The teacher ratings of specific components are listed. Almost all components, in fact, were rated as useful, with mean scores above four on the five-point scale. The most frequently rated components were the Lesson Plans, which provided material for class discussion, and the definition and discussion of terms (Use the Right Words). Sixty teachers rated these components, suggesting that at least 90% of the teachers used these materials. The vast majority gave usefulness ratings of 4 or 5 to each, with half or more of those who rated these components evaluating each as "very useful," yielding mean scores of 4.45 for Lesson Plans and 4.38 for Right Words. In other words, these components were widely used and appraised positively when employed.

<u>Component</u>	<u>Number of Ratings/Forms with this component listed</u>	<u>Frequency Breakdown</u>					<u>Mean Usefulness</u>
		<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>Rating</u>
Lesson Plans	60/67	2	0	2	21	35	4.45
Use the Right Words	60/67	1	4	4	13	38	4.38
Suggested Activities	48/67	0	1	7	16	24	4.31
Recommended Resource Organizations	37/67	0	2	5	9	21	4.34
Recommended Materials	35/67	0	3	8	5	19	4.14
Games & Puzzles	42/57	3	4	0	17	18	4.04
Poster	44/52	2	0	4	10	28	4.41
True/False Test	17/17	0	0	1	6	10	4.53
The Normal Ups & Downs	15/17	0	0	0	4	11	4.73
Warning Signs	14/17	0	0	0	6	8	4.57
Schizophrenia Activity	13/17	1	0	1	3	8	4.31
The Brain Game	7/10	0	0	0	2	5	4.71
Phobias Worksheet	8/8	1	0	2	3	2	3.63

- Qualitative comments on “Breaking the Silence” and its components were provided by 34 teachers. Typical comments were as follows:
 - “The materials were fantastic – a very creative and interesting way to teach difficult material.”
 - “It was wonderful to have lots of activities to choose from.”
 - “This was an outstanding program. The students came away with a new understanding of mental illness.”

While the comments were mostly positive, a few concerns were noted, as seen in the following examples:

- “ The lessons were too young for the students (high school).”
- “ Why is there a focus on schizophrenia? I would rather have materials on a more common mental illness, like anxiety or depression.”

Overall, the findings from the teacher evaluations indicate strongly positive appraisal of the *Breaking the Silence* (BTS) educational package. Teachers who tried the program in their classrooms indicated that they believed the program to be a useful and effective means of educating students about mental illness and dispelling myths and stereotypes. Almost all (94%) expressed intentions to continue use of the curriculum in the future. These results suggest, then, that the BTS program has considerable promise for education of children about mental illnesses.

Although this initial analysis provides promising results, the sample size was somewhat small and probably selective. It is unclear how many teachers received the curriculum materials but did not use them and how many teachers used the materials but did not return evaluations. A larger and more representative set of teacher evaluations, with more careful monitoring of both distribution and return of evaluations, will be needed for a more definitive assessment.

A second methodological weakness of this research analysis is the multiple versions of the evaluation forms. Although we have treated the different forms as equivalent, it is possible that different forms and formats can differentially affect responding. Furthermore, the fact that not all components were listed on all rating forms leaves different--and sometimes small--numbers of raters for the various components. A single standard evaluation instrument for all respondents is needed.