✳ MENTAL HEALTH MEDIA GUIDE

The Tip Sheet

ABOUT

The Mental Health Media Guide is a groundbreaking and comprehensive resource to help content creators expand positive mental health portrayals.

WHY IT MATTERS

Entertainment media has the power to shift culture around mental health, influencing audience perceptions and the way we speak up, seek help, and support others.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

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What You Need to Know

Prevalence of mental health conditions continue to rise: The percentage of Americans experiencing a mental health condition is rising, and nearly one-quarter of people with a mental health condition report an unmet need for treatment.

There are many barriers to help-seeking: Cost is the most common obstacle to accessing mental health care but cultural norms and perceptions also play a role. Many believe that mental health challenges aren't serious enough to require treatment, or that asking for help is a sign of weakness. People also fear judgment, making them uncomfortable talking about mental health with family or close friends, and in some cases perceive greater stigma than actually exists.

Mental health is underrepresented in media: Viewers are still limited in the number and diversity of stories they are likely to see, and the nature of those portrayals is not always helpful or supportive to people who are struggling.

Self-care can help, and technology is making treatment more accessible: There's growing acknowledgement among both clinical experts and the general public that self-care practices can be critical to emotional health and wellbeing and many are incorporating these practices into their daily lives. At the same time, new telemedicine and technology platforms allow people to access clinical care more readily and take a more proactive approach to mental health care.

There is widespread support for prioritizing mental health: Nearly 80% of people believe that mental health is a priority and almost 90% feel that making mental health care more accessible and affordable is important.

Storytelling Tips

Portray a Range of Mental Health Experiences

Expand depictions of mental health and treatment to reflect the full continuum of mental health experiences — from thriving to actively coping to really struggling — and help viewers understand that self-care and treatment can benefit anyone, at any time. See full tip.

Diversify Representation

Represent diverse characters and communities in mental health storylines to help viewers from all backgrounds feel seen, recognize warning signs, and seek help when they need it. See full tip.
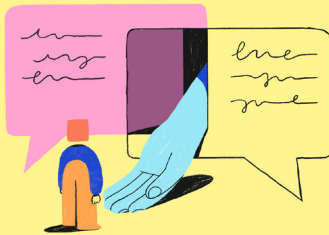
Show Conversations About Mental Health and Help-Seeking

Show conversations about mental health happening in relatable and positive ways to make viewers more comfortable with the concept of speaking up and asking for help. See full tip.

Spotlight Support from Friends and Family Members

Elevate stories of friends and family who are supportive — or eventually become supportive — to make asking for help less scary and to normalize peer support. Within these stories, include information on how to recognize warning signs and effectively support someone who is struggling. See full tip.
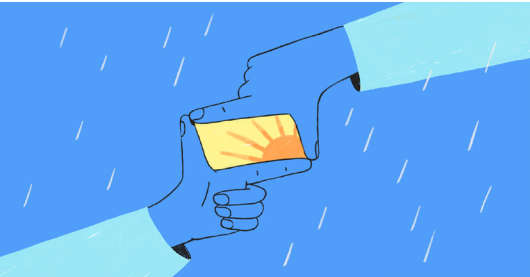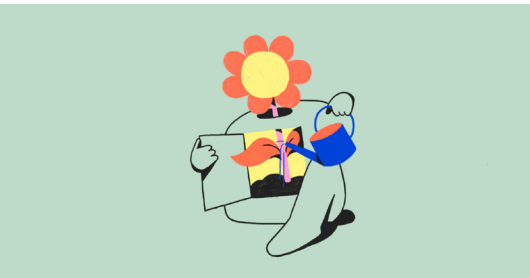
Depict Effective, Realistic Help-Seeking and Treatment

Show realistic portrayals of effective therapeutic treatments to help lessen fear and misconceptions and make viewers more likely to seek help. **See full tip.**

Highlight the Power of Coping Skills and Self-Care

Minimize depictions of self-care that make it seem like an indulgence or luxury only for those who can afford it. Show a broader range of self-care and coping practices with an emphasis on the positive impact they can have on our mental health. **See full tip.**

Represent the Causes of Mental Health Challenges Accurately

Portray the range of factors that contribute to mental health challenges to better equip viewers to support themselves and the people they care about. **See full tip.**
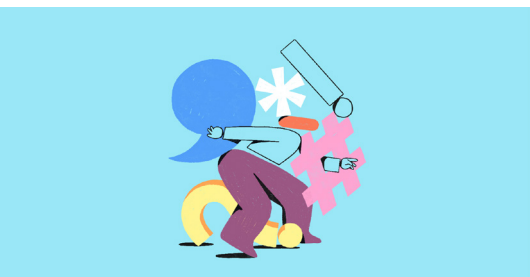
Consider the Impact of Language

Try to avoid: defining people by their feelings or conditions (say person *experiencing depression* instead of *depressed person*); incorrect usage of medical terminology (like *schizo*, *psycho* and *bipolar*); and talking about suicide in a stigmatizing way (use *died by suicide* instead of *killed himself* or *committed suicide*). **See full tip.**

Move Past Stereotypes

Be mindful of stereotypes when depicting mental health storylines and aim for authenticity over tropes. <u>See full tip.</u>

Be Cautious About Overstating and Reinforcing Stigma

Watch out for narratives that overemphasize stigma, judgment, or mistreatment toward people with mental health challenges, which can prevent viewers from speaking up if they are struggling. <u>See full tip.</u>
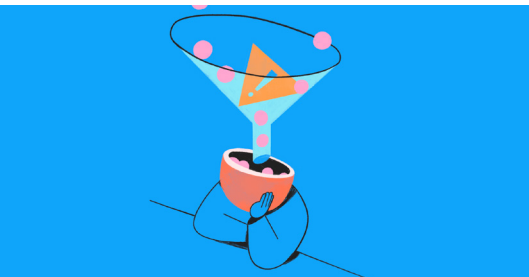
Avoid Sharing Potentially Harmful Details

Examine storylines involving harmful behaviors to avoid unintentionally providing information or reinforcing misconceptions that could make someone engage in similar behaviors. <u>See full tip.</u>
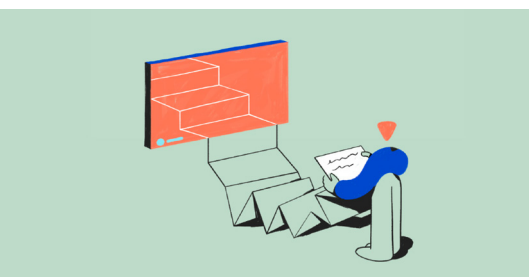
Provide Resources and Calls-to-Action

Provide your audience with clear ways to take positive action as part of their viewing experience. <u>See full tip.</u>

Step by Step Process

No matter what phase of the production cycle you're in, there are steps you can take to maximize your project's positive mental health impact and minimize any potential for harm.

Identify Mental Health Themes

Identify the mental health themes within your project, browse the relevant sections of the Guide, and establish your intent. Whether your project has mental health at the heart of its story or the mental health themes are more tangential, there are ways to create meaningful impact.
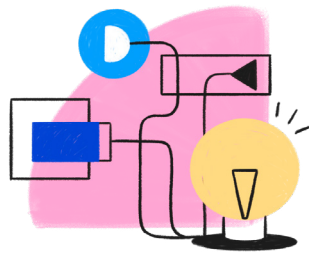
Connect With Experts

Engage an advisor with mental health expertise to help you maximize positive impact and mitigate potential harm, including developing a plan to support cast and crew. Get started by checking out the Expert Directory.

Consider Potential Pitfalls

Anticipate potential themes or scenarios in your story that could contribute to emotional struggles among viewers, influence harmful behaviors, reinforce negative stereotypes, or create barriers to help-seeking.

Expand Your Vision, Increase Your Impact

Brainstorm ways to maximize impact within your story, whether it's through more diverse representation, incorporating conversations about mental health and help-seeking, depicting effective and realistic treatment options, or countering negative stereotypes.
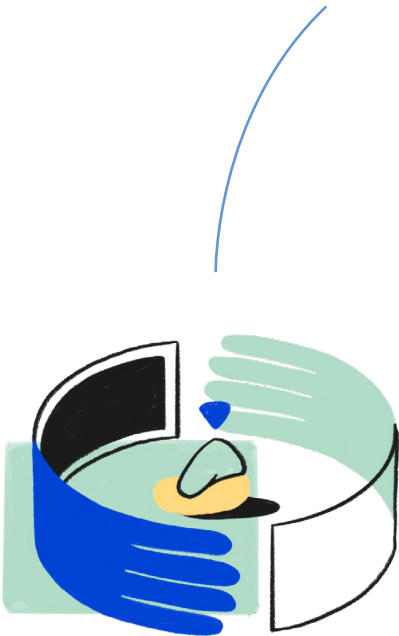
Support Your Audience Before, During, & After Viewing

Make a plan to support viewers by incorporating resources into your content, which can help audience members turn an emotional response into help-seeking and other positive actions. Also, consider how your marketing materials, social media content, and other aspects of your project can impact viewers.

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FIND MORE ONLINE

Visit MentalHealthMediaGuide.com for a growing list of audience resources and further in-depth recommendations based on your project's genre, specific mental health conditions, intersecting identities, and more.