

What is YAM?



Youth Aware of Mental health, also known as YAM, is a school-based programme for young people ages 13 to 17 in which they learn about and discuss mental health.

YAM was evaluated in an EU-wide Randomized Controlled Trial in which more than 11,000 youth participated. The Saving and Empowering Young Lives in Europe (SEYLE) research project sought to evaluate three school-based interventions for mental health promotion and suicide prevention. Results found YAM effective in reducing new cases of suicide attempts and severe suicidal ideation by approximately 50%.¹ New cases of depression were reduced by approximately 30% in the youth participating in YAM.

We have also observed that YAM increases peer support and helps grow solidarity between young people.

YAM IS DIALOGUE AND PLAY

In YAM, youth are invited to role-play and discuss everyday situations that are important to them. The topics range from relationships with peers and adults, changes in mood, to feeling sad or facing a stressful situation. As a group, the students reflect on how they might feel if faced by such events and discuss how to handle challenging real-life situations.

Emphasis is placed on peer support and information is given on how and where to find professional help if needed.

YAM IS FIVE SESSIONS LONG

In five one-hour classroom sessions over three weeks, mental health is explored through discussion and role-plays departing from pedagogical materials that include slides, posters, and a booklet for each young person to keep.

The YAM instructors work to set a safe environment by valuing and treating the youth present as experts on their mental health. This is something that young people tell us they appreciate about YAM. In YAM sessions across the world, youth have addressed concerns such as stress related to schoolwork, navigating community violence, managing interactions with peers on social media, and how to support a friend who isn't feeling well.

1. Wasserman D, Hoven CW, Wasserman C... Carli V. *School-based suicide prevention programmes: the SEYLE cluster-randomised, controlled trial.* Lancet. 2015 Apr 18;385(9977):1536-44.

YAM IS YOUTH-DRIVEN

In YAM, youth voices take center stage. Young people are listened to and their experiences are valued and inform the exercises. The adults present do not instruct them on how to think, feel, and act. Instead, with the support of the instructor, everyone present works to understand different perspectives and come up with possible solutions to problems.

In YAM, we recognise and appreciate that each participant brings with them their own life experience and we believe that we can learn a lot by inviting difference in opinion. Our focus is not on finding one-size-fits-all solutions to mental health. Instead, we consider how different people feel, the possible reasons for their actions, and what kinds of support they might need in each situation.

YAM IS WORLDWIDE

YAM was created to be adaptable to serve youth worldwide. By relying on each group of participating youth to bring up topics that are important and relevant to them, the programme aims to be as relevant to youth in rural India or the USA as it is to young people in urban parts of Sweden and Australia. Whenever we do YAM in a new country or cultural context, we work with local youth and youth professionals to make sure that the programme stays appropriate and sensitive to local needs.

WHO ARE THE YAM ADULTS?

Two trained adults conduct every YAM programme. One of these adults have completed an intensive week-long certification before becoming a YAM instructor and the other one a shorter training to act as support in the classroom. All YAM instructors have prior experience working with groups of youth (e.g., youth workers, teachers, social workers, counselors or school psychologists). If a young person shows signs of psychological distress, the YAM instructor will speak with them and make sure that they receive appropriate support.

BENEFITS OF YAM

YAM invites young people to reflect on their emotions and to consider different approaches when faced with life challenges or mental health concerns. By participating in an inclusive and youth-led dialogue about mental health, we have observed that YAM helps grow solidarity among young people.

Participation in YAM has long-term benefits. After YAM, young people often tell us that they feel more confident in supporting a friend in need. In interviews with young people who participated in YAM, they point to strategies they learned in YAM later used in difficult real life situations². Perhaps most importantly, these youth recognise the need for support as they encounter life challenges. To meet this need, YAM shares local information about physical and mental health care options as well as youth-serving organisations in their communities with them.

WHO OWNS THE RIGHTS TO YAM?

Mental Health in Mind International AB (MHiM) is the exclusive distributor of YAM. MHiM is a R&D company created with support from Karolinska Institute Innovations AB. The company is co-owned by Karolinska Institute Holding AB and the researchers who developed YAM.

2. Wasserman C, Postuvan V, Herta D, Iosue M, Varnik P, Carli V. *Interactions between youth and mental health professionals: The Youth Aware of Mental health (YAM) program experience*. PLoS One. 2018 Feb 8;13(2):e0191843.