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Topics: Contemporary artistic and art educational approaches to diversity and cultural changes

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Chasing the Sun: The Art of Mental Health Awareness

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The increased pressures of our current student climate are leading them to the brink of emotional breakdown and vulnerability. The inability of our students to cope with stress and anxiety during their teenage years can lead to drug and alcohol use, and suicide. And, unfortunately, the stigmas associated with mental health illness and drug use prevent many teenagers, and adults, from seeking help or treatment.

As I explain to my students, “If a classmate comes to school with a broken arm we treat it as a badge of honor; we ask if we can help carry their books or sign their cast. This is a *physical ailment*. However, if a student comes to school with mental health issues, we avoid them and are quick to place labels on their behavior. Additionally, if someone’s behavior involves drug or alcohol addiction it is often viewed as “dirty”; hence the reason we refer to someone as “getting clean.”

Art can have a tremendous impact in the area mental health and addiction. For example, educators can use art history lessons to examine the struggles of notable artists such as Vincent Van Gogh and in doing so, gain a sense of appreciation and empathy. Furthermore, art making and writing lessons can provide opportunities for students to address issues related to their own mental health, and practice exercises in mindfulness.

This presentation will examine these topics and share lessons that combine art education and mental health, mindful practices with teenage students.