

A Startup Guide for Schools and Community Groups

Warr;ors Club Curriculum

"LIFE IS TOUGH,
BUT SO ARE YOU"

EST. 18'-19'
in North Salem High School

WARR;ORS

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I. Introduction

- **Who are the Warr;ors?**

The Warr;ors Mental Health and Wellness Club is for students who have been impacted by mental illness, those considering a career in the helping professions, medical field, or teaching, those interested in advocacy/public speaking, and those that see the value of brain health and wellness. Members are a strong voice for reducing the stigma surrounding mental health issues, working to inform, teach, advocate, and connect all students. Therefore, practicing confidentiality, demonstrating empathy, establishing boundaries, and remaining non-judgmental play a crucial role for all members.

This organization was created by students from Walter Panas High School in Westchester County to “stomp out the stigma of mental illness.” With their counselor’s support, they created a club with the goal of educating and changing perceptions in their school about mental health. The club’s mission is:

To enhance mental health literacy through discussions, classroom presentations and public speaking. To bring visuals and resources into schools and to make reaching out for support more acceptable through peer based activities and connections.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “focusing on establishing healthy behaviors during childhood is more effective than trying to change unhealthy behaviors during adulthood.” An equally important part of this conversation is to help students identify risk and protective factors, as learning and resiliency can result in positive decision-making and life-long success.

Since its birth at Walter Panas High School in 2015, the Warr;ors has expanded to North Salem High School, and has been honored by the NYS Office of Mental Health for its Student-Involved Approach to eliminating the stigma of mental illness.

The Warr;ors club consists of high school students ranging from grades 9-12, depending on the individual school's needs. Some schools may encourage middle school student's involvement for projects or encourage a Junior Warr;ors Club.

The existence of the semi-colon in the Warr;ors title symbolizes the Warr;ors alignment with Project Semicolon, a Mental Health non-profit organization that functions as an anti-suicide initiative. Founded in 2013, the project focuses on "presenting hope and love to those who are struggling with depression, suicide, addiction and self-injury" (Project Semicolon). The Warr;ors included the semicolon in its name since the goals of both projects are closely aligned.

● What do they do?

The Warr;ors club seeks to educate and change perceptions in schools about mental health. The Warr;ors, with the help of their advisor, work to promote mental health awareness and address possible stigmas using school-based education and training. The Warr;ors have a student-involved approach to eliminating the stigma of mental illness, while drawing attention to and educating about overall mental health, through student run events, activities, and social media. Club events within the school may include:

- presenting at school assemblies and faculty meetings
- writing and producing short plays detailing the experiences of students on the mental health continuum
- working directly with elementary and middle schoolers through Mental Health and Wellness Fairs or in the classroom
- creating and hanging informative posters in the school
- decorating bulletin boards
- *Warr;or Wednesday* PSAs

The Warr;ors are active on social media, using Instagram, Facebook, and/or Twitter to gain the attention of students in the district and members of the surrounding community.

Social media links: **Instagram: @_NSwarriors**

● Why your school needs the Warr;ors

Mental Health Basics

- 1 in 5 kids struggle with their mental health
- If you are feeling depressed or angry or anxious, you are not alone
- Mental health problems can happen to any young person, regardless of age circumstance
- They can affect a child or youth as easily as cancer or a physical disability
- There is no one to blame for it and there should be no shame in it

The Warr;ors club could fulfill some requirements of these new benchmarks. New York State recently instituted new social emotional learning benchmarks for grades K-12, which focus on three main goals:

1. “Develop self-awareness and self-management skills essential to success in school and in life.
2. Use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.
3. Demonstrate ethical decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.” (June 30, 2018, NYSED Gov).

We all experience mental health problems from time to time. Feelings like sadness, worry, anger, fear and grief are understandable reactions to negative events in our lives, and don't typically last very long. But if these feelings continue for long periods of time, become overwhelming, and 'get in the way' of daily life, then something more serious may be happening.

Mental health difficulties cover a whole range of negative feelings that just won't go away. A person can have unpredictable moods, anxiety, trouble sleeping, eating problems, or just feel really, really sad all the time.

The good news is that mental health issues can be managed and overcome. The sooner one gets help, the quicker these feelings will go away. About 90% of those in treatment are successful.

Mental health is part of your overall health. It's about:

- How you feel, think, and behave
- How you cope with the ups and downs of everyday life
- How you feel about yourself and your life
- How you see yourself and your future
- How stress affects you
- How you deal with the negative things that happen in your life
- Your self-esteem and your confidence

Contributing Factors

There is a combination of factors that are believed to cause mental health problems, including:

- **Biological Factors** - for example genetics, whether someone in your family has a mental health issue
- **Negative early life experiences** - for example abuse, neglect, death of a family member or close friend
- **Individual factors** - for example self-esteem or way of thinking about yourself and others
- **Current social circumstances** - for example school, work, relationship or family stress, or negative life events

Furthermore, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), “1 in 5 youth aged 13–18 (21.4%) experiences a severe mental disorder at some point during their life. For children aged 8–15, the estimate is 13%” (2019). According to NAMI, more than one third of students with mental health disorders drop out of school, and more than 90% of people who complete suicide show signs of some variety of mental health disorders.

The stigma surrounding mental health, especially in the middle and high school setting keeps students from seeking help and support. Educating and changing the perceptions of the student body, parents, and faculty to end the stigma surrounding mental health can benefit every school community.

II. Getting Started

- **Finding an advisor**

In order to begin a Warr;ors club at your school, you will need to find a dedicated member of the faculty to serve as the advisor. The advisor is responsible for working with the school and administration to get approval, funding (if indicated), and support for Warr;ors projects and events.

Because the Warr;ors club is primarily student driven, the advisor needs to be someone who is trusted by faculty and students. The advisors should also be willing to partner with community agencies. Effective advisors may be counselors, support staff, teachers, school-aides or coaches. The advisor should not be “appointed” but a volunteer who is passionate about the cause and believes in the mission of the Warr;ors.

Once designated, the advisor’s first responsibility is to reach out to Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) to help identify founding member students. Initially this only needs to be two or three students. Once administrative support is acquired, member recruitment will begin.

- **Obtaining school/faculty support**

One of the key elements for a successful Warr;ors club is strong administrative support, which requires clear communication between the advisor, members and administrators. Since the Warr;ors is student driven, it is recommended that a few students who have expressed interest in the club put together a document outlining the club’s expectations and goals, as well as the types of support needed from the administration (e.g. financial, physical, etc.).

After presenting the Warr;ors’ goals to the administration, the advisor can bring questions and concerns back to the students. With the support of the advisor, club members will develop a plan to overcome obstacles brought to their attention. The advisor will then communicate the adapted plan to the administration.

- **Member Recruitment**

A successful Warr;ors club needs a group of dedicated, diverse students who use their leadership qualities and social influence to dissolve the stigma of mental health issues. Warr;ors need to be compassionate, collaborative, hard-working, and trustworthy, ranging across social groups and grade levels in order to reach the entire student body.

In the beginning, members of the club may be those who expressed interest in joining, but it is important that the diversity of the members expands. Faculty and peer nominations to the club can facilitate this diversity. Some students may not go out of their way to join, but a nomination to the club could increase interest. These nominations can be informal: faculty or students approach a potential member who may be a good fit, and ask them to join. Recruitment can also be done formally, in which potential members receive letters or memos saying “You have been nominated to become a Warr;or!”, followed by why they are a good candidate for the club.

Another way to recruit members is through a well-executed kick-off event.

Kick-Off Event

The recommended kick-off event for the Warriors club is called the 'Door Project.' It is used to bring attention to the Warriors and its goals, and also aid in member recruitment. The Door Project is about Josh Yandt, a student from Canada. He struggled with bullying and depression and through his own act of kindness, changed his entire life. These acts of kindness turned Josh's life around.

The kick-off event will begin with every class simultaneously watching the video clip. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIHtuKc3Gjg>). The principal, a student involved in the club, and the advisor will speak over the PA and explain the premise of the video, emphasizing the need for connection within the school. They will invite the students to sign their door (which is a physical full-sized door) during their lunch/free periods. The door symbolizes the opening of hope to stomp out mental health stigma. By signing it, students are committing to aid in these efforts. The door should be placed next to a table with related resources and a club sign-up sheet. Members and/or the advisor should be there to speak about the goals of the Warriors club. This door will become an icebreaker for future club discussions, and should be placed in a visible location representing the school's fight against mental health stigma.



III. Club Structure

- **Advisor Expectations**

The advisor of your school's Warrior club is responsible for organizing, aiding, and supporting the efforts and goals of the Warriors. The advisor relays the goals and efforts of the students to the administration, essentially serving as a gateway for communication between students and faculty. The advisor is responsible for ordering outside materials and resources, and working with organizations not affiliated with the school.

As the club begins to grow, the advisor is responsible for forming the club's structure. This means deciding how to appoint members to positions. Advisors are also responsible for choosing which positions to fill (different structural suggestions will be recommended in the curriculum).

****The advisor must be aware or obtain school district safety protocols on mental health crisis, suicide assessment and any other potential mental health challenge that could come their way.**

- **Positions**

President (Co-Presidents): The President or Co-Presidents are responsible for running each meeting. This means they come to the meeting with an agenda, and structure the course of the meeting. The President(s) is also responsible for running day-to-day activities within the school and communicating with the advisor. In the community setting, the President(s) presents to the school-board, faculty, community, and others on the work of the club. And while the advisor is primarily responsible for communicating with faculty members, the President(s) can reach out to faculty as well - specifically to foster connections in the classroom setting.

Secretary: The secretary is responsible for taking notes during meetings, logging community service hours for members, sending out meeting recaps, and organizing the team drive (see club materials and events).

The duties of the secretary are primarily organizational and relate to club communication. It should be noted that these duties could be fulfilled by the President(s) depending on the size of the club.

Treasurer: The Treasurer is responsible for overseeing club finances. This includes tracking money brought in through either fundraising, donations, grants, etc., as well as the expenses of the club. Depending on the size of the club, these duties could be fulfilled by the President(s), and this decision is up to the discretion of the advisor and the members.

Committees/Alternative Positions: One way to get members more involved in being a Warr;or, is to create additional positions and committees to share responsibilities. Giving members responsibilities solidifies their role in the club and motivates them to become more involved. For example, committees can be created to supervise an activity/event the club is running and assign each committee member a certain responsibility. Additional positions can include social media chair, faculty outreach chair, craft chair, etc.

● Member Responsibilities

Membership in the Warr;ors club is flexible, permitting members to choose their own level of commitment. Members attend according to their schedules and other obligations. Meeting attendance is not mandatory, but all Warr;ors are committed to the cause, supportive of one another, and hardworking when they are giving their time. Warr;ors are encouraged to participate in club activities and events, along with their planning and preparation. This can include creating and hanging signs, taking on a role in the Warr;ors' skits, or helping with social media tasks.

Member responsibility and extent of involvement is at the discretion of the individual member and officers, and should be adapted to the school climate.

- **Friends of the Warriors (FOTW)**

The Friends of the Warriors was originally created to involve middle schoolers, but has expanded to be a branch of the organization dedicated to those who want to get involved, but may need a lower level of commitment. Friends of the Warriors are less involved in logistics and planning, but still participate and support the club with event preparation and activities. FOTW can also be community agencies that support the cause.

IV. Warr;or Training

Districts should select training that best meets their specific needs.

- **Three Hour Mandatory Look, Listen Link training**

This curriculum was developed in Washington State as a lesson for middle school students. There are four 45-minute sessions that cover healthy ways for students to cope with their stress. Program objectives include:

- Identify causes and symptoms of stress and anxiety in themselves and friends.
- Identify and demonstrate healthy ways to deal with stress and anxiety.
- Understand facts about teen depression.
- Recognize symptoms of depression in a friend.
- Name adult resources to go to for help.
- <https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/look-listen-link-health-curriculum-middle-school>

- **SafeTalk**

- Suicide Alertness for Everyone
- SafeTALK offers valuable skills to everyone 15 and older and requires no formal training or prior experience in suicide prevention. SafeTALK-trained helpers can recognize at risk individuals and take action by connecting them with life-saving intervention resources.
- <https://www.livingworks.net/safetalk>

- **More than Sad**

- There are three different programs available for high school students, parents, and teachers. There are two films, *Teen Depression* and *Preventing Teen Suicide*. The curriculum teaches students, teachers and parents about the warning signs of suicide and how to get help for at-risk students. It also covers teen depression and how students can receive treatment.
- <https://afsp.org/our-work/education/more-than-sad/>

- **QPR**

- QPR stands for Question, Persuade, and Refer — the 3 simple steps anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide.
- Just as people trained in CPR and the Heimlich Maneuver help save thousands of lives each year, people trained in QPR learn how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to help.
- QPR can be learned in our Gatekeeper course in as little as one hour.
- <https://qprinstitute.com/>

V. Meeting Structure

- **How to Run a Meeting**

Meetings are based on the club's current goals. If there is an upcoming event or activity, meeting time will be spent planning or physically preparing for the event. During these occurrences, members will be assigned specific tasks: hanging posters, crafting, or speaking with faculty, while other members work on required logistics.

During a general meeting, the President(s) takes the lead, while the advisor monitors and plays a supportive role. The President(s) reviews previous minutes and presents the agenda. The President(s) facilitates the discussion and assign tasks with a time-line. The President(s) must also allow discussion so members can speak freely about their ideas and the events being planned. The Warriors is collaborative, and it is important that there be designated meeting time to allow members a chance to share ideas and give feedback.

VI. School Wide Events

- **Gratitude Trees**

Students can cut leaves out of paper and write down what they are grateful for. Then, they can create a tree with all of their gratitude leaves to reflect upon.



- **Lesson for Middle School students (Look, Listen and Link)**

The Look, Listen and Link program is a youth suicide prevention program. It aims to identify areas of stress among students and teach them how to cope with their stress and anxieties. The lesson includes ways to identify depression and resources for students to get help. <https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/look-listen-link-health-curriculum-middle-school>

- **Mental Health and Wellness Fair**

Community agencies would be invited to set up informational tables in the cafeteria. Classes can visit and teachers could incorporate mental health into their curriculum. Teachers could hand out questionnaires that students fill out at the fair.



● Worry Box Project at Elementary Schools

Students decorate a box and write down their worries or anxieties to put inside. This is a way for them to acknowledge and cope with their worries.

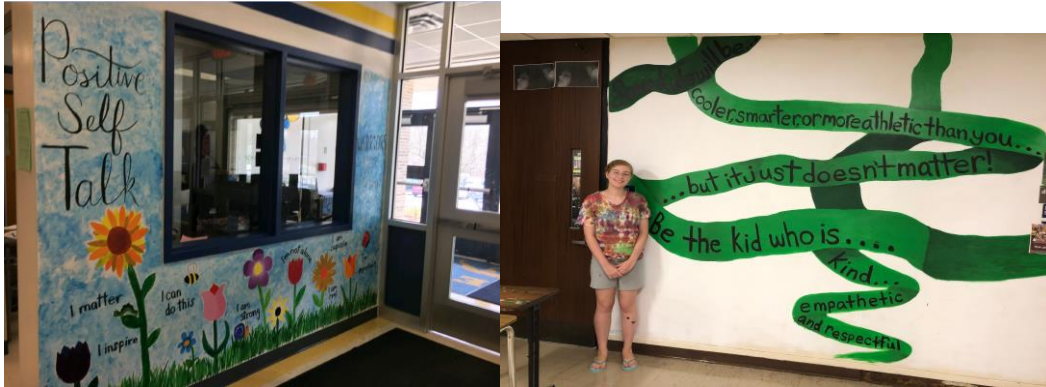


● Warr;or Wellness Wednesday- PSA

Announcements are made over the PA on Wednesdays that include inspirational quotes or mental health facts.

- ☐ “Did you know that mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to her or his own community?”
- ☐ “Did you know that mental illnesses are more treatable than heart disease?”
- ☐ “Did you know that making a connection with just one adult can change your life?”
- ☐ “Did you smile at someone today? A smile can change the course of someone’s bad day.”
- ☐ “Positive self-talk and a growth mindset will impact your mental well-being in a positive way!”
- ☐ “Ask yourself what self-care are you using?”

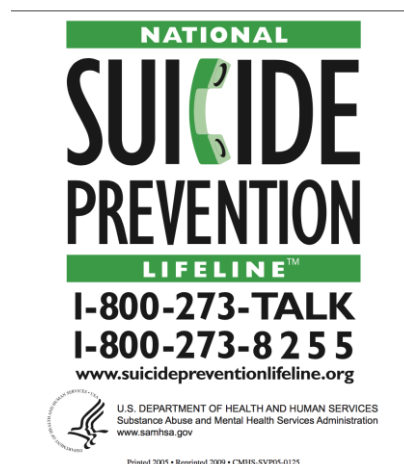
- Murals



- Inspirational Sayings on Restroom doors (You Matter...)

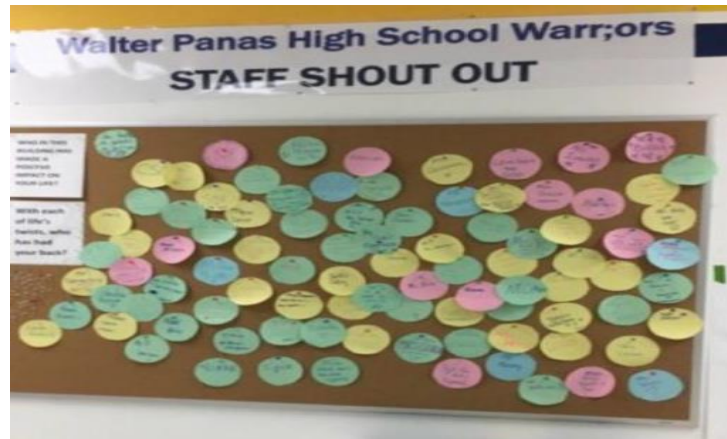
Students can write post it notes containing positive affirmations on them and place them in the restrooms. These notes can provide encouragement and inspiration to those who see them.

- Suicide Prevention Magnets



- **What Makes You Smile Board**

Students can decorate a board with images and words that bring them happiness. The goal is to make a visual representation of what makes them happy in life.



- **Mental Health Visuals throughout the school**

Students can use printouts or create inspirational posters to post throughout the school. This creates a positive environment for all the students to take part in.

- **Plant a Lavender garden**

Students can plant lavender and hand them out to faculty or make relaxation sachets for in school suspension rooms.

Resources

<https://disabled.westchestergov.com/westchester-county-dept-of-community-mental-health>

<https://mhanys.org/>

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/>

<http://youthspeakers.ca/josh-yandt/>

<https://www.crisistextline.org/texting-in>

<http://www.loftgaycenter.org>

<https://www.nami.org/>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/child-and-adolescent-mental-health/index.shtml>

<https://www.putnamcountyny.com/social-services/mental-health-services/>

<https://www.putnamcountyny.com/suicidetaskforce/>

<https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/look-listen-link-health-curriculum-middle-school>

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

<https://www.understood.org/en>

National Crisis Hotline - 800-273-TALK (8255)

Putnam County Crisis Hotline - 845-225-1222

Crisis Text Line - text TALK to 741741

LGBTQ+ - 1-866-488-7386

Warr;ors Q & A



Why should mental health matter to teens?

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages 10 to 20. 50% of mental illnesses are present before the age of 14. Teens want correct and accurate information, they are the frontline. Educating teens and school communities about mental health provides a safe, caring, supportive environment for teens to grow and connect with others.

Why do we need a mental health club?

Why do we need a debate club or an art club? Clubs create a safe space for like minded students to connect and focus on their interests. The Warr;ors is not a support group, even though feeling a sense of connection is supportive. We are an *educational* group that address stigma, isolation and bullying through school based visibility, community connections and school wide projects.

Who can join the Warr;ors?

The Warr;ors club is open to anyone! If you are looking to help others, educate your peers on mental health awareness, be a resource and support system for your community and friends, or just be a part of a club geared towards being healthy, happy, and engaged - then the Warr;ors may be the perfect fit for you!

Why a semicolon?

Project Semicolon is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention of suicide. Their work is based on the foundation and belief that suicide is preventable and everyone has a role to play in preventing suicide. Warr;ors decided to use the semicolon to support their mission as well as represent hope. A semicolon represents that there is more to the sentence, just like there is always hope in life.

How does a member explain what the Warr;ors club is to a peer?

Warr;ors is a club about kids helping kids. We see each others' social media posts and notice when friends act differently, we are scared at times and do not know what to do. A club like this can educate us and give us support.

Are students picked on that join the club?

No - in fact, Warr;ors are looked at as reliable, helpful, caring individuals that their peers can lean on and come to when they have a concern or want to feel a part of something.

What are some of the activities the Warr;ors do?

The Warr;ors educate students by presenting in various grade-level classes, teaching students and offering building wide activities such as an annual mental health fair. The Warr;ors also runs a session at the Alliance For Safe Kids conference in Yorktown each Spring. Members paint bulletin boards, murals, and bathroom doors with inspirational messages. The Gratitude Tree Project is a big hit around the holidays. Members make little trees and give them out to the adults in the building, showing thanks. Plans are underway to work with athletics and train team captains in Look, Listen and Link. The goal is to have a Warr;or on every sports team, along with captains as they can be a resource for players.

What are the responsibilities of a Warr;or?

Each school can decide on how they structure the club. There can be a President or Co-Presidents. A public relations and treasurer position along with a secretary. It is helpful to spread the responsibilities and give as many students as possible a leadership role.

Who are the Friends of the Warr;ors?

Friends of Warr;ors can be students who can't commit to weekly club meetings but want to be connected and help out at events. Friends can also be community agencies that support the mission.

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Additional Information and Support

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