



# How contemporary Disney film can be used for mental health teaching in schools: a case study of *Inside Out* (2015)

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## Background

The mental illness burden in the United Kingdom is growing, currently costing our economy an estimated 94 billion a year. With half of all lifetime mental health problems starting before age fourteen, tackling these problems early is imperative<sup>1</sup>. This poster aims to highlight the importance of childhood mental health teaching and fostering healthy socio-emotional development.

Children can often lack professional support; a quarter of children were found to have no help at all and half rely on their teachers for support<sup>2</sup>. The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence recommends that teaching should start at primary education, with a curriculum that integrates the development of social and emotional wellbeing. However, teachers do not feel they have enough training to deliver effective mental health teaching<sup>3</sup>. Through learning about common mental health conditions, it would allow children to recognise these symptoms within themselves, seek support if needed, and help eliminate the social stigmatisation of mental illness.

A concept that has gained momentum recently is 'edutainment': a portmanteau of 'education' and 'entertainment'. Not only does edutainment increase student's enthusiasm and excitement, film has been shown to enhance memorability<sup>4</sup>. Children learn in diverse ways and video engages different learning styles: verbal, visual and musical. Film is a universal language: making teaching transparent and helping children with learning difficulties and disabilities. Animated films can be particularly useful for showing emotion as they give the animators complete creative control. With the growing video streaming landscape, it is easier to access than ever before.

## Method

- Dialogue was used to compose a list of words that correlate with the depressive symptoms outlined in ICD-10<sup>5</sup>
- A tally was made of how many times each word was said in the duration of the film
- Coding results were compared to artistic analysis of key scenes to discover depression is portrayed more explicitly or inherently

## Results

|                   | <i>Inside Out</i> (2015) |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Annoying          | 1                        |
| Awful             | 4                        |
| Breakdown         | 2                        |
| Cry/Cries/Crying  | 15                       |
| Droopy            | 1                        |
| Hurt              | 3                        |
| Loneliness/Lonely | 2                        |
| Miserable         | 1                        |
| Sad               | 8                        |
| Sigh              | 7                        |
| Upset             | 1                        |

### Coding analysis

The most common words are 'cry / cries/ crying' and 'sad', corresponding to the an ICD-10 core symptom of depressive disorder: lowered mood.

Other common words, such as 'awful' and 'annoying', show the ICD-10 symptoms of pessimism and reduced self-esteem.

### Artistic analysis

*Inside Out* can also be used to explore the importance of developing emotional awareness. The relationship between Joy and Sadness in this film is quite unique. Joy is not entirely yellow: she has blue eyes. This represents how Joy cannot exist without Sadness. Thus, the film highlights that while feelings of sadness are unpleasant, they are essential.



This realisation that all emotions are important leads to the Emotions working together later on. We see more complex memories made of multiple emotions (see image), and an expanded emotions console. *Inside Out* not only shows depressive symptoms, but the value of healthy socio-emotional development.

## Conclusion

Sadness shows depressive symptoms in an exaggerated way:

***"Only I'm too sad to walk. Just give me a few... hours."***

The use of humour makes discussions about Sadness more light-hearted. This may aid classroom teaching; helping to reduce the stigma surrounding Sadness and allow the topic to become more approachable. Around half of young people associate mental illness with isolation, believing that they would be treated differently and lose friends with a mental illness diagnosis. *Inside Out* shows this is not the case: the film resolves with Joy realising the importance of Sadness, and Riley surrounded by friends playing hockey.

It could be argued that this is a less accurate portrayal of depression as Sadness is portraying sadness, which despite many parallels, does not equate to depression. Riley's symptoms are subtle and a more accurate portrayal of depression. Overall, when comparing *Inside Out* to ICD-10 guidelines, it is fair to say this film represents common depressive symptoms.

By using *Inside Out* to instigate teacher-led classroom discussion on mental health and depression, children can develop their emotional intelligence, understand mental illness, and help them seek support earlier, if ever needed. School-based mental health teaching is still in early stages, only becoming compulsory from this year, so identifying accurate, effective teaching resources is crucial.

## References

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