

Disruption of Gameplay

When the player's actions are guided by a misunderstanding around mental health, any disruptions can cause them to reconsider. An intense disruption halts the player to confront them with their misunderstanding, whereas mild disruptions subtly suggest the player is doing the wrong thing.

- ❖ What problematic (mis)understandings might guide the player's actions?
- ❖ How might you design the disruption? (e.g., a sudden pause in the action or a new perspective)
- ❖ How intense can or should the disruption be? (e.g., does it halt progress entirely or allow them to fail forward?)

Multi-Dimensional Characters

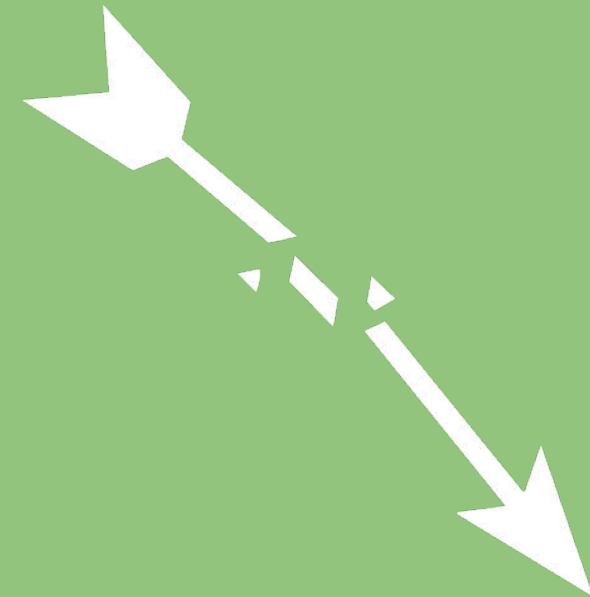
Multi-dimensional characters allow players to learn from or identify with those experiencing mental health challenges by highlighting that they are more than just their condition. To best build empathy these experiences should be authentic (e.g., not be stereotyped or sugar coated).

- ❖ How might you learn about the people with lived experience with a mental health challenge and their rich life and personality?
- ❖ How might you ensure a character is presented as more than just their mental health challenge?
- ❖ How might player interaction reveal the character's multiple dimensions?



Multi-Dimensional Characters

Multi-dimensional characters portray an authentic experience of those who live with a mental health challenge without reducing them to just their condition.



Disruption of Gameplay

Events that disrupt the flow of gameplay can force the player to stop and reflect on their actions or beliefs.

Narrative or Mechanical Discoveries

Discoveries are perspective challenges started by the player, because they're the one who made the discovery the challenge can be more impactful. After a discovery the player might view characters differently or have entirely changed their playstyle.

- ❖ What information can be left for the player to find that challenges their perspective?
- ❖ How might you design a mechanical discovery? (e.g., using an old mechanic in a new way)
- ❖ How might you design a revelatory discovery for the player?

Normalised Representations

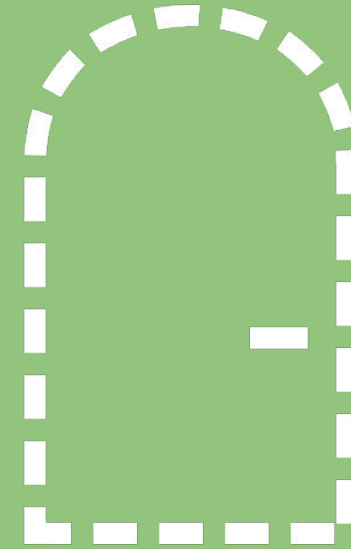
Past representations of mental health in games have perpetuated harmful stereotypes, which further stigmatises the topic. Normalised representations counter stereotypes by presenting mental health challenges as a normal everyday thing.

- ❖ How might you present to the player a range of normalised representations? (e.g., not just for the protagonist)
- ❖ What kinds of interactions might the player have with these characters?
- ❖ How might you present a range of lived experience with mental health challenges without over-representation?



Normalised Representations

Combating stigma requires neutral and non-stigmatising portrayals to normalise mental health challenges and their presence in everyday life.



Narrative or Mechanical Discoveries

Discoveries can present new or intentionally conflicting information, or provide a new mechanic to interact with the game.

Revealing a Depth of Complexity

Revealing a depth of complexity can confront the player's over-simplified understanding of mental health (e.g., "depression is just feeling really unhappy").

- ❖ What aspects of mental health might the player simplify?
- ❖ How might you reveal the depth of complexity to the player? (e.g., a narrative reveal, a plot twist, introducing a new mechanic)
- ❖ How might the revelation of complexity change how the player plays the game?

Intermixing Content

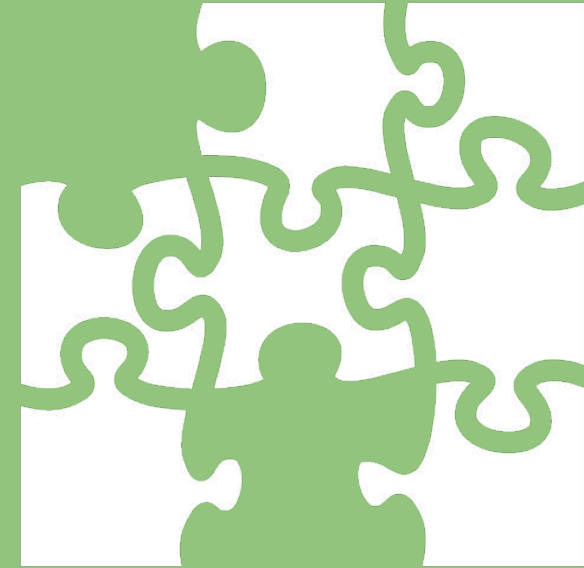
By intermixing content on a mental health topic with other, off-topic content, you can make the on-topic content more approachable.

- ❖ What could the perspective challenging content look like?
- ❖ What could the non-challenging content look like?
- ❖ How might you include the perspective challenging content alongside non-challenging content?



Intermixing Content

Intermixing content is presenting the perspective challenging content alongside non-challenging content.



Revealing a Depth of Complexity

Introducing complexity can challenge players' simplistic understandings of mental health.

Subverting a Game, Genre, or Narrative Trope

Existing game tropes may perpetuate a harmful stereotype about mental health (e.g., people with schizophrenia are “homicidal maniacs” or mental asylums are dangerous locations).

- ❖ What are some common mental health tropes in games?
- ❖ Why are they tropes? What design function do they have?
- ❖ How might you design a subversion of these tropes?
- ❖ What message does subverting the trope convey?

Obfuscation

Making the the persuasive intent of the game less overt or *-in your face-* can assist in preventing players from reacting negatively to the perspective challenge

- ❖ What type of persuasive content might the player be resistant to?
- ❖ How might you design more covert perspective challenges?
- ❖ How might you design a reveal to let the player know what they’ve been challenged with? Should you reveal it?



Obfuscation

Obfuscation is hiding the true intent of the game's mental health goals or persuasive content.



Subverting a Game, Genre, or Narrative Trope

Intentionally subverting tropes can shift the player's perspective towards reality and away from harmful stereotypes.

Subverting a Set Expectation

The player's expectations can be set by interactions with other characters or through the game's mechanics. These expectations could be based on a stereotype, only for the subversion to highlight how problematic they are.

- ❖ How might you give the player a false expectation?
- ❖ Can the false expectation be based on the player's stigma or perspective?
- ❖ When could the expectation be subverted to be most impactful?

Repetition

In order to tackle a player's stigma towards mental health, repetition is a key ingredient to reversing ingrained beliefs.

- ❖ What is one key message you want the player to leave with?
- ❖ What are subtle and explicit ways of repeating the topic?
- ❖ How might you repeat the desirable perspective without it feeling overly repetitive for the player?



Repetition

Raising the stigmatised topic repeatedly can improve the chance of changing the player's mind.



Subverting a Set Expectation

Perspective challenges can occur when the game sets the player up with a false expectation, only to later subvert it.

Presenting Lived Experience

Letting the player know that they are witnessing someone's lived experience of a mental health challenge can help reduce their reactance when the presented reality differs from what they believed about a mental health issue.

- ❖ Whose lived experience would you be presenting?
- ❖ How might you directly include the lived experiences of others into a game?
- ❖ How can you ensure the player knows they're witnessing someone's lived experience?

Questions Over Answers

There is no "correct" solution to challenging stigma, instead games should raise questions. By getting the player to ask questions, it creates opportunities for them to explore multiple possibilities, and reframe how they view the mental health challenges.

- ❖ What are some desirable questions to raise?
- ❖ How might the player seek to explore those questions?
- ❖ How could you help the player accept that it is okay to not have an answer?
- ❖ How might you design experiences to get the player questioning their perspective?



Questions Over Answers

Many stigmatised topics don't have clear-cut solutions. Often games should raise questions that prompt reflection rather than offer solutions.



Presenting Lived Experience

Presenting lived experience of a mental health challenge can reduce stigma from an uninformed outsider perspective.

Presenting the Player's Past Experiences

When players see their experiences represented in game (e.g., relationships, conversations, or life events) it can foster common ground between the player and those with mental health challenges presented in the game.

- ❖ What common experiences around mental health could there be?
- ❖ How could you present those past experiences in game?
- ❖ How might you let the player insert their own experiences into a game?

Set Expectations

When a game doesn't meet a player's expectations they may reject the game or just quit. Shaping the player's expectation before they play (e.g., through marketing, game genre, or theming) can prepare the player to be challenged. Once established, you can always choose to later subvert these expectations for effect.

- ❖ What expectations might the player have before playing the game?
- ❖ How might you shape the player's expectations?
- ❖ Which of those expectations best link to the perspective you want to challenge?



Set Expectations

Challenging a player's perspective is easier when their incoming expectations are considered or intentionally shaped.



Presenting the Player's Past Experiences

Presenting the player's own past or similar experiences can encourage empathy or understanding.

Placing Player or Character in Difficult Situations

Difficult situations could be representations of what people with mental health challenges experience (e.g., seeing events through eyes of another character, or weighing up difficult choices).

- ❖ What kind of difficulty could you present? (e.g., mechanical, emotional, ethical)
- ❖ How can the difficulty represent a difficulty in the mental health challenge presented?
- ❖ How might you design an event that is more difficult if the player has stigmatised the topic?

Mechanical Representation of Mental Health Challenges

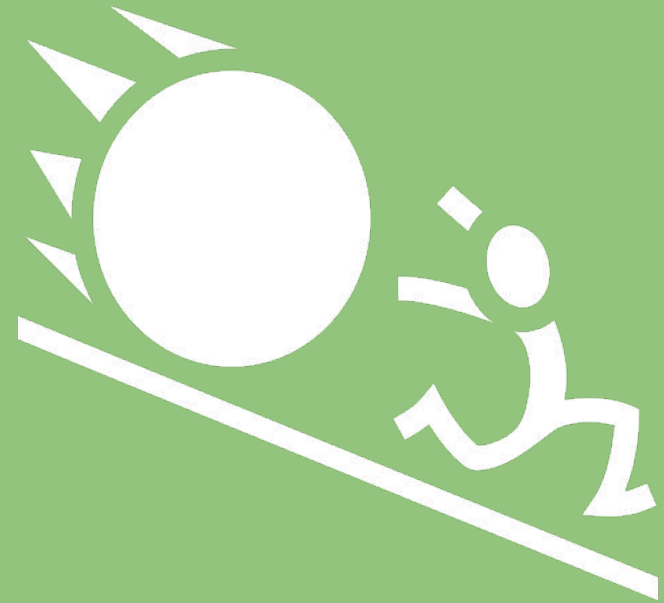
Players can uniquely experience mechanical representations of mental health challenges in games. Be careful when giving mechanics to mental health challenges, because it can trivialise matters or ignore people's lived experience (e.g., sanity meters which is reductive of mental health).

- ❖ How might you create mechanics to accurately represent living with a mental health challenge?
- ❖ What can the mechanic teach the player about the mental health challenge?
- ❖ What does the game mechanic incentivise the player to do? Is this desirable?



Mechanical Representation of Mental Health Challenges

Games that mechanically represent living with a mental health challenge, allow the player to explore it differently than in other media.



Placing Player or Character in Difficult Situations

Some perspective challenges occur when the player finds themselves in a difficult situation.

Raising Philosophical or Societal Topics

Mental health connects to many wider societal and philosophical topics like fairness, equality, or the nature of truth that can raise people's interest.

- ❖ What topics are closely linked to the perspective you want to challenge?
- ❖ How can the player be informed that the topic is going to be raised?
- ❖ How might you represent or let the player engage through the topic through interactions and game mechanics?

Holding a Mirror up to the Player

Holding a mirror up to the player means they're confronted with a stigma or perspective that they hold. A "mirror" can let them see their own perspective and how it impacts those around them.

- ❖ How might you hold a mirror up to the player?
- ❖ When would showing the mirror to the player be most impactful?
- ❖ What personal reflections are desirable for the player to have?



Holding a Mirror up to the Player

A stigma or misguided perspective on mental health challenges can be unnoticed by the person who holds it.



Raising Philosophical or Societal Topics

Including philosophical and societal topics in games can act as a natural entry point to raise mental health challenges.

Fantasy or Realistic Setting

Players respond differently to exploring mental health in a world of wizards or robots versus one based in reality. A fantasy setting can make the topic more approachable, but a realistic setting may be easier for the player to relate to.

- ❖ Which do you consider more important: approachability or relatability?
- ❖ What would happen if the setting swapped from fantasy to realistic (or vice versa)?
- ❖ How would you design a setting that tackles mental health challenges in a combined fantasy and realistic setting?

Raising Unconsidered Aspects of Mental Health

Shining a light directly on unconsidered topics gets the player to realise how much they knew or assumed about certain mental health challenges.

- ❖ What is an important aspect to raise awareness about?
- ❖ What kind of experience or event could prompt awareness?
- ❖ How can the player explore these unconsidered topics in game? Should they be able to?



Raising Unconsidered Aspects of Mental Health

Confronting the player with aspects of mental health that they hadn't considered allows them to view the topic in a new a light.



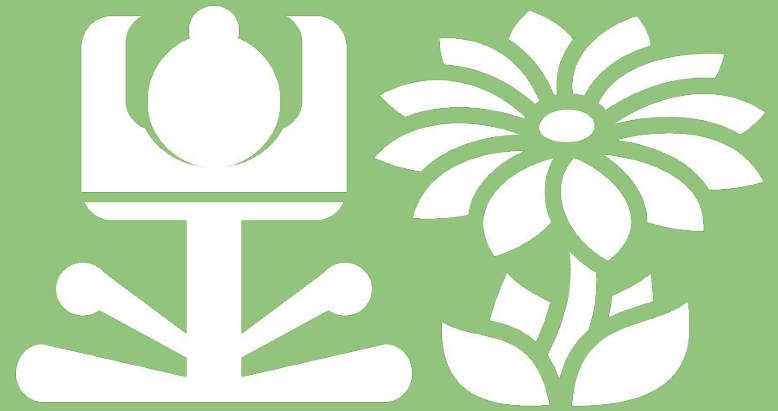
Fantasy or Realistic Setting

The setting impacts how the topic of mental health can be raised and its effect on the player.

Abstract or Explicit Topic

Abstract mentions often leave it up to the player to interpret how the game connect to mental health, whereas explicit mentions can directly point to the topic.

- ❖ How important is it for the player to know the game involves the topic of mental health?
- ❖ What would happen if the subject matter swapped from explicit to abstract (or vice versa)?
- ❖ How would you design an experience that is both abstract and explicit about the topic?



Abstract or Explicit Topic

When a game includes the topic of mental health, they can tackle the subject either abstractly or explicitly.

Introduction

Welcome to the Challenging Perspectives on Mental Health (CPMH) toolkit! This deck is designed to help game developers create ideas for experiences that tackle stigma and perspectives around mental health in games.

The CPMH toolkit is not a replacement for working with mental health experts or speaking directly to those with lived experience, however it does present a synthesis of research in how perspective challenges are experienced by players and how to intentionally design them.

For more information see:

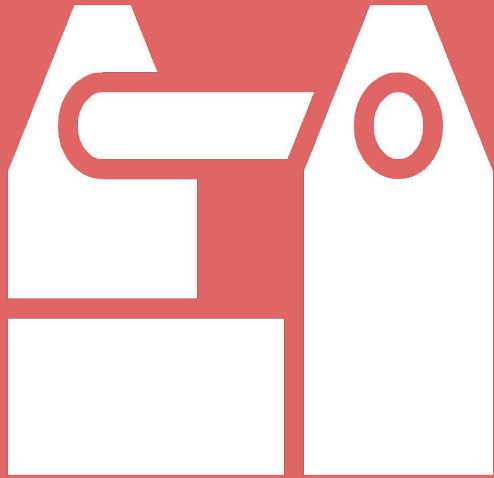
1. <https://tinyurl.com/TakeThisWhitePaper>
2. <https://tinyurl.com/PerspectiveChallenge>
3. <https://tinyurl.com/ReflectiveGames>
4. <https://tinyurl.com/MentalHealthInGame>

Finding a Stigma or Perspective to Challenge

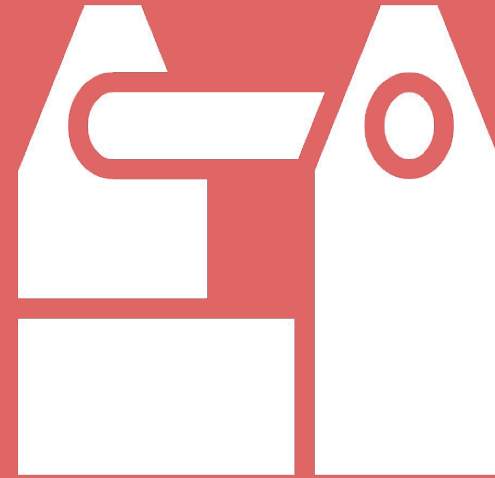
Mental health stigma involves negative attitudes or discrimination against someone because of their mental health challenges. Whereas a perspective is an person's thoughts or feelings towards something. Identifying which stigma or perspective around mental health to challenge can be difficult, some suggestions to help you find one.

- ❖ What mental health challenges are under-represented or inaccurate in games?
- ❖ What are inaccurate or problematic representations of mental health in existing games?
- ❖ Could you draw inspiration from your own or others' lived experiences with mental health challenges?

Consider the stigmas or unexplored topics relating to mental health challenges. Alternatively, the "Quick Start Guide" information card has some exemplar suggestions to begin using this tool.



Toolkit Information



Toolkit Information

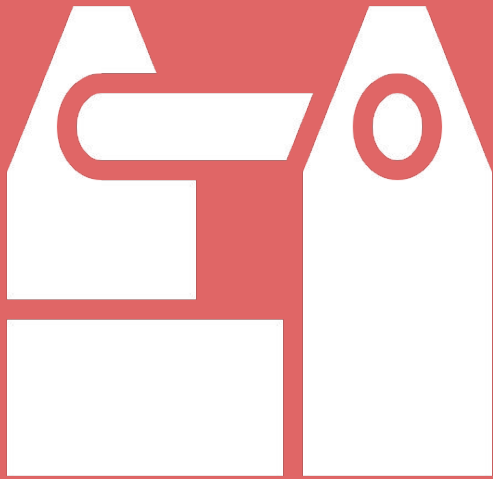
How to use the CPMH toolkit?

1. Shuffle the green deck. This deck describes play events and techniques that research suggests can challenge player perspectives.
2. Draw one card from the green deck and place it face up.
3. Based on the perspective you want to challenge, brainstorm (alone or in a team) game concepts or moments in the game that incorporate the drawn card.
4. Repeat steps 2 to 3 until time runs out, you have multiple satisfactory designs, or have drawn the last card.

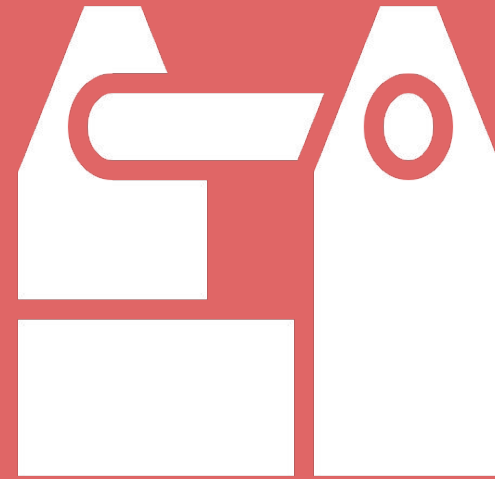
Quick-start Guide

If you do not have a targeted perspective on mental health to challenge, below are some suggestions to use as an initial springboard.

- ❖ The reductive pairing of mental health challenges with horror games.
- ❖ Game's over-reliance on "psychotic maniacs" as enemies.
- ❖ Games using simplistic mental health mechanics (e.g., sanity bars or "fix-all" pills).
- ❖ People with phobias become completely debilitated when they face their fear trigger.
- ❖ The stigma that asking or needing help is a sign of weakness.



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