

kidSMART

Mental Health and Resiliency Resources
for Teachers of Grades 4 - 6 Students



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Calgary
Mental health for all



Welcome!



Hello Schools and Community Groups!

Welcome to KidSMART, a youth-focused education toolkit. Within this toolkit you will find knowledge, lesson plans, and resources to support students in Grades 4 - 6 with mental health education.

What is the Canadian Mental Health Association – Calgary Region?

Canadian Mental Health Association - Calgary Region (CMHA Calgary) builds awareness and provides education and support for individuals and families living with mental health or substance use concerns. CMHA Calgary works closely with other community organizations to bridge gaps in the mental health care system and facilitates access to important services and resources.

What is YouthSMART?

CMHA Calgary's YouthSMART (**Youth Supporting Mental Health and Resiliency Together**) integrates collaborative, youth-led mental health learning opportunities in local junior and senior high schools, and youth-focused community groups. YouthSMART knows that students are incredibly influential amongst their peers, within their schools, families, and communities. As such, YouthSMART values students, teachers, and group leaders as co-contributors, actively involved in the programming and opportunities that directly impact youth wellness, and works with schools and community sites to inspire, inform, and transform the culture surrounding mental health. For more information about CMHA Calgary's YouthSMART, check out: YouthSMART.ca.

What is KidSMART?

KidSMART is a youth-focused mental health education toolkit targeting students in Grades 4 - 6 (ages 8 - 12). This toolkit — based on CMHA Calgary's existing YouthSMART program — will provide relevant resources and information uniquely built for the learning needs of this population.



Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that the people of CMHA Calgary live, work, and play on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, and the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations, more commonly known as the Stoney Nakoda Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta. This Land Acknowledgement reminds us of the histories that precede us, highlights our responsibilities going forward, and helps bring us together on a shared journey of Truth and Reconciliation.

Funder Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the Calgary Foundation for their support to develop this KidSMART toolkit. Their backing of this project allows CMHA Calgary the opportunity to expand our reach to those younger age ranges to begin their mental health knowledge journey.

How To Use This Toolkit



This toolkit incorporates curriculum, lesson plans, and activities for teachers and community leaders to deliver education surrounding themes of Stress Management, Mental Health Awareness, and Skills for Being There.

Each section of the toolkit begins with a brief overview of fundamental concepts and is followed by activity outlines and instructions. Any required student worksheets are indicated by the "Materials Required" section located at the top right of the activity page and also in the header with the following icon:



The student worksheet can be found in an additional document.

Lessons are of various lengths but many can be completed in a 30 - 45 minute timeframe. The lessons are presented beginning with introductory concepts and building knowledge as they go. As a result, it is suggested lessons are done in the order presented, but assess your students' knowledge and comfort with concepts if altering the order of lessons.

Mental health education is extremely important for all ages. ☺

These lessons provide a variety of methods to introduce, practice, and develop a strong understanding of how to deal with stress, build solid mental health habits, and support the well-being of peers.

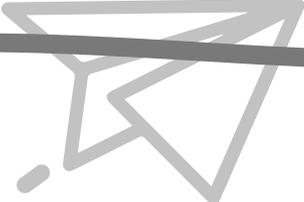
Although we have referred to "classrooms" throughout, KidSMART can be used in both schools and community settings by teachers, group-leaders, and sport coaches to provide mental health education across a variety of locations.

Table of Contents

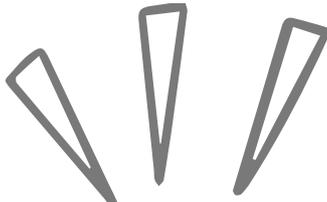
Stress Management and Healthy Coping.....	7
Learning Objectives.....	8
Topic Overview.....	8
What is Stress?.....	8
Types of Stress.....	8
How Does Stress Impact Students?.....	9
Fight-Flight-Freeze Response.....	9
Stress Management and Healthy Coping.....	10
Activities.....	10
Activity 1: What is Stress?.....	11
Activity 2: Stress Experiment.....	12
Activity 3: Effects of Stress.....	14
Activity 4: Body Emotion Connection.....	15
Activity 5: Fight-Flight-Freeze Comics.....	17
Activity 6: Causes of Stress.....	19
Activity 7: Stress Test.....	20
Activity 8: Coping Strategies.....	21
Activity 9: Stress Management Journaling.....	23
Activity 10: Expressing Emotions.....	25
Activity 11: Track My Mood.....	27
Activity 12: Affirmations.....	28
Activity 13: Stress Bucket.....	29
Activity 14: Stress Structure.....	31
Activity 15: Progress Chart.....	34

Mental Health Awareness.....	35
Learning Objectives.....	36
Topic Overview.....	36
What is Mental Health?.....	36
What is Mental Illness?.....	36
Examples of Mental Illness.....	37
Relationship Between Mental Health and Mental Illness.....	37
What is Neurodiversity?.....	38
Causes of Mental Illness.....	38
Impacts of Mental Illness.....	39
What is Stigma?.....	39
Stomp Out Stigma.....	40
Stigma Self-Assessment.....	40
Pathways to Recovery.....	43
Activities.....	43
Activity 1: What is Mental Health?.....	44
Activity 2: Mental Health Vocabulary.....	45
Activity 3: Mental Health Spectrum.....	46
Activity 4: Iceberg.....	48
Activity 5: Signs of Mental Illness.....	49
Activity 6: LEGO Activity.....	50
Activity 7: Someone Else's Shoes.....	52
Activity 8: Mental Health Fact vs. Fiction.....	54
Activity 9: Stigma Telephone Game.....	56
Activity 10: Mental Health Origami Conversation Starter.....	58
Activity 11: Wellness Wheel.....	60
Activity 12: Gratitude.....	63
Activity 13: Resiliency.....	65
Activity 14: Mindfulness.....	67
Activity 15: Community of Support.....	68
Activity 16: Mini Books.....	69

Skills for Being There.....	71
Learning Objectives.....	72
Topic Overview.....	72
Mental Health and Mental Illness.....	72
Warning Signs Someone Needs Help.....	72
Ethics and Confidentiality.....	73
What Are The Skills for Being There?.....	74
Limits and Boundaries.....	75
Activities.....	75
Activity 1: Stick Figure.....	76
Activity 2: Warning Signs.....	77
Activity 3: Cross The Line.....	78
Activity 4: Traffic Lights.....	81
Activity 5: Skills for Being There.....	83
Activity 6: Role-Play Scenarios.....	84
Activity 7: Advice Column.....	85
Activity 8: Conversation Starters.....	86
Activity 9: Boundaries.....	87
Activity 10: How to Get Support.....	89
Activity 11: Self-Care.....	90
Optional Project-Based Learning.....	92
Parents/Guardians Information Letter Template.....	96
Stay Connected with CMHA Calgary.....	97
References.....	98



Topic



Stress Management and Healthy Coping



Stress Management and Healthy Coping

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to understand what a stress response is, how stress affects the body and mind, and how to cope with stress in healthy ways.



Topic Overview:

What is Stress?

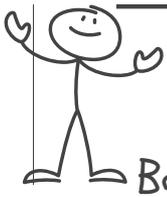
Stress is a normal reaction to the demands of life. It comes from both the good and the bad things that happen in your life. When your brain experiences a challenging situation, it releases a rush of hormones that send you into an automatic "fight, flight, or freeze" response. Students may identify stress as something that alters their natural balance or makes them feel overwhelmed.

Types of Stress

Stress can be both positive and negative. Positive stress is stress that excites or motivates you (e.g. a sports game). Negative stress can overwhelm or upset you (e.g. a big test or a fight with a friend).

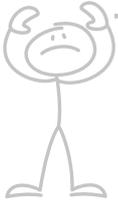
Stress can also be divided into internal or external. External stress is stress that is outside of your control. Examples can include tests, homework, switching schools, bullying, fighting with friends, and sports or performances. Internal stress is stress that is within your control. It can also include how you react to external stress. Examples include negative thinking, low self-esteem, procrastination, and feelings about external stressors.

How Does Stress Impact Students?



Muscles hurt, headache, upset stomach, sweating

Body



Irritable, mood swings, anger, scared, feeling overwhelmed

Mood



Negative thoughts, difficulty paying attention, forgetfulness, poor judgment

Thoughts

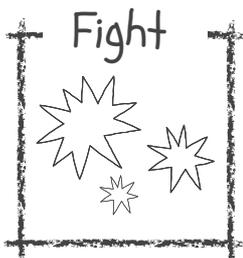


Restlessness, avoiding activities, trouble sleeping, procrastination

Behaviour

Fight-Flight-Freeze Response

When your brain perceives a threat, your body releases a burst of hormones to fuel your fight-flight-freeze response.



When you deal with the stressful situation head-on.



When you feel panicked and leave the situation.



When stress takes over and you can't react at all.

When the body engages in the stress response, certain body mechanisms engage including increased heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension, shallow chest breathing, and body temperature.

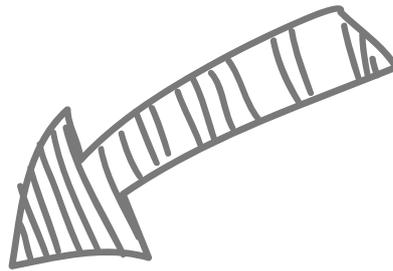
Stress Management and Healthy Coping

There are a variety of ways to deal with stress and these can be often categorized into healthy or unhealthy coping strategies. Healthy coping helps reduce stress and relieve symptoms. Examples for students may include going for a walk, listening to music, spending time with a pet, talking with a friend or trusted adult, and taking calming breaths.

Unhealthy coping can avoid dealing with the stress, create more stress, or create unhealthy habits. Examples for students may include avoiding friends/family, not talking about feelings, unhealthy food, procrastinating, and venting.

Activities:

- 1: What Is Stress?
- 2: Stress Experiment
- 3: Effects of Stress
- 4: Body Emotion Connection
- 5: Fight-Flight-Freeze Comics
- 6: Causes of Stress
- 7: Stress Test
- 8: Coping Strategies
- 9: Stress Management
- 10: Expressing Emotions
- 11: Track my Mood
- 12: Affirmations
- 13: Stress Bucket
- 14: Stress Structure
- 15: Progress Chart



Activity 1: What is Stress?



Time Requirement
15 - 30 minutes



Materials Required
Pencils/white paper optional



Activity Information

THINK – PAIR – SHARE

Use this activity to assess where students' knowledge levels and attitudes around stress currently exist. Some misinformation or gaps in understanding may present themselves. This isn't the time to correct every assumption, but instead, note areas where students may need more support or knowledge.

Student Instructions:

- **THINK** – Students first individually brainstorm ideas that come to mind when they think about stress.
- **PAIR** – They then get into partners or small groups and discuss what they have come up with.
- **SHARE** – Activity wraps up with a class discussion about what was brainstormed individually and as a group.



Activity 2: Stress Experiment



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Open space, pylon, or other easy-to-grab items

Activity Information

This interactive activity will simulate what stress feels like. Students can use this as an opportunity to discover what stress feels like for them and others.

Discussion:

- What does stress feel like?
- What situations give you stress?

Student Instructions:

Students will explore stress through a simulated experience. There are a variety of ways to do this. Choose from the following depending on what works best for your students and space.

- Students will start simulating stress by doing exercises that increase heart rate and breathing (e.g. jumping jacks or running in place)
- *Alternative option:* Play a game such as “pylon” to create more anticipation or stress
 - o Pylon instructions: Two participants stand at an equal distance from each other with a pylon (or another easy-to-grab item) in-between them
 - o Movements such as jumping jacks, hopping on one foot, touching toes, dance moves are called out and each participant does the movement
 - o When "pylon" is called, the first person to reach down and grab the pylon gets a 'point'

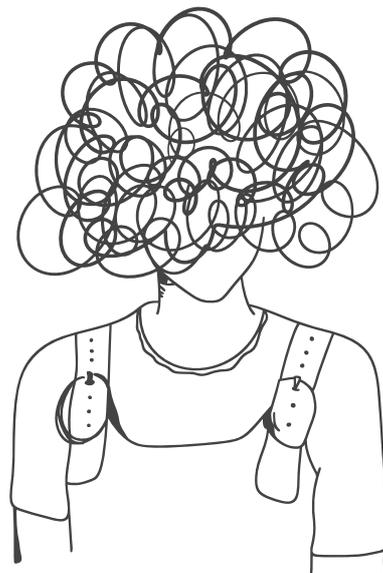
Activity 2: Stress Experiment (cont.)

- o Once the physical component has begun, add extra challenges such as asking them questions while they are "stressed" and watch how their focus and concentration are impacted
- o Continue long enough for students to observe the effects on themselves or others

Debrief:

Ask students any of the following:

- What happened when you were in a stressful situation?
 - o To your thoughts?
 - o To your emotions?
 - o To your behaviour?
 - o To your body?
- Did you feel like it was harder to focus on multiple things at one time?
- What would happen if you never got a "break" from your stress?



Activity 3: Effects of Stress



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

By exploring how stress impacts individuals, students will be more able to identify when they are experiencing stress. This allows students to more quickly act to deal with stress and build coping strategies.

Student Instructions:

In this activity, students will brainstorm how stress impacts their thoughts, emotions, behaviour, and physical body.



Activity 4: Body-Emotion Connection



Time Requirement
30 - 45 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, white paper

Activity Information

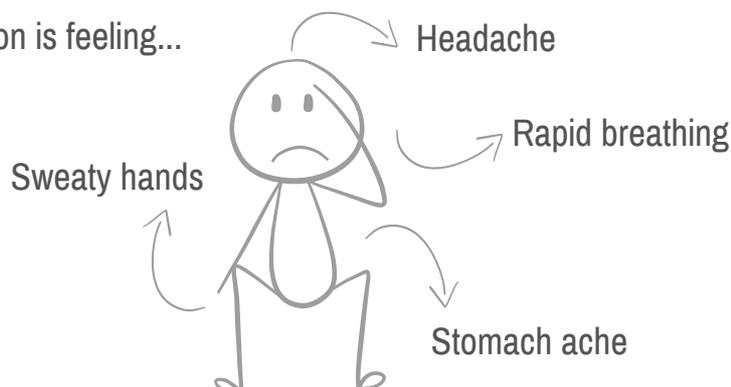
This activity allows students to understand the connection between the emotions we feel and the physical effect we notice in our bodies. Sometimes when we experience emotions, we can also have a strong reaction in our bodies. This is called the body-emotion connection. If we can recognize these signals in our body this can help us more easily identify the emotion we are feeling.

Discussion:

- How do you know you are feeling a certain emotion?

Sometimes our bodies react before we even realize what is going on. If we identify the feeling in our bodies it can also help us identify the emotions we are feeling and better deal with the situation.

Example: A person is feeling...



A person might then guess that they are feeling stressed.

Activity 4: Body-Emotion Connection (cont.)

Student Instructions:

- Students should work in small groups
- Students will take turns picking an emotion. They will then draw (at the bottom of the student worksheet or a separate piece of white paper) or act out that emotion focusing on the physical symptoms the body may experience when that emotion is happening. The other students in the group will have to guess what the emotion is
- Remind students to think about signals from the body such as heart rate and sweaty palms
- For example, a student who picks the emotion “angry” might draw a stick figure with a flushed face, clenched hands, and a pounding heart

Students can use the example emotions and possible physical symptoms in the student worksheet as needed or come up with their own examples in their groups.



Activity 5: Fight-Flight-Freeze Comics



Time Requirement
45 minutes



Materials Required
White paper, pencils, and
colouring materials

Activity Information

Students will explore various types of stress responses in this comic activity. Students can complete this individually or in groups.

Student Instructions:

Warm Up Activity:

- Ensure students understand the definition of fight-flight-freeze responses
- Give students various examples of the fight-flight-freeze reactions and have students identify what type of reaction it is
- This is a good time to clarify any questions or misunderstandings about what happens in each type of reaction

Examples:

- You yell at someone when you get overwhelmed ➤ Fight
- You come across a bear when hiking and cannot move ➤ Freeze
- Ducking immediately when you realize a basketball is flying towards you ➤ Flight
- Starting your homework as soon as it gets assigned ➤ Fight
- Your mind goes blank when you have a test ➤ Freeze
- Someone jumps out at you during a haunted house and you turn and run ➤ Flight

See topic overview on page 9 for teacher background information

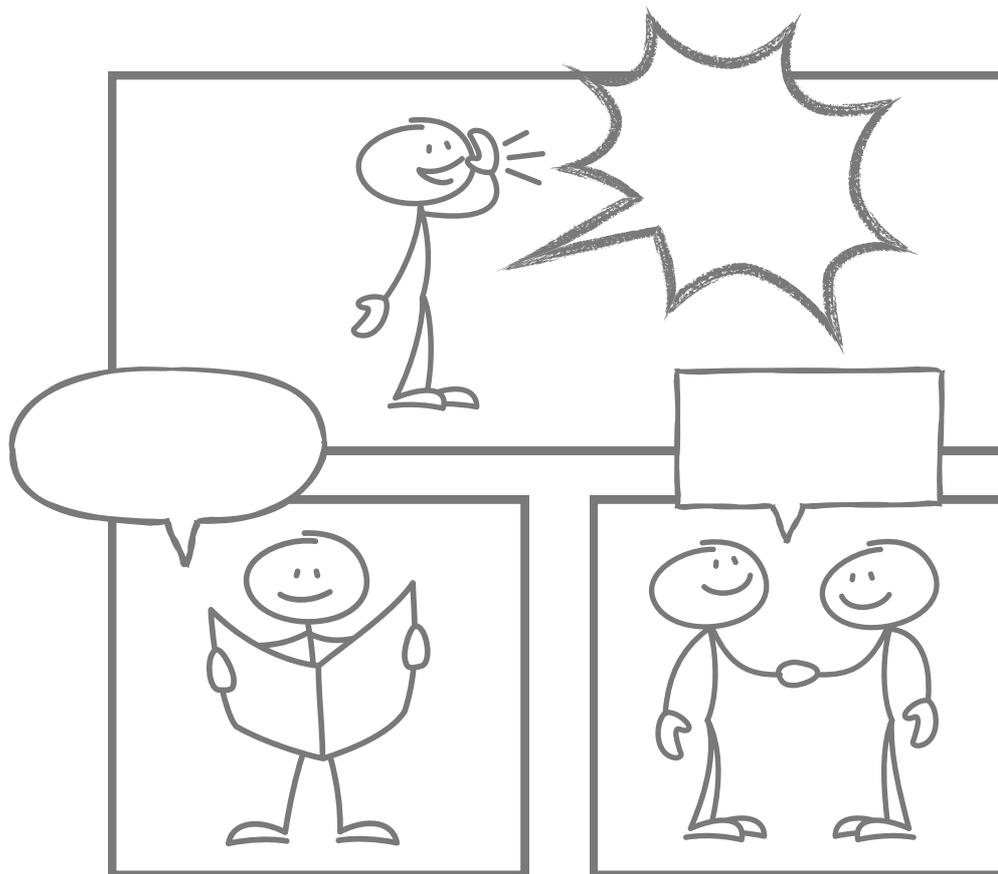
Activity 5: Fight-Flight-Freeze Comics (cont.)

Student Instructions:

Fight-Flight-Freeze Comic Activity

Through comics, students will describe a stressful situation that occurred to them.

- Describe the situation, the reaction, and what exactly happened
 - o Depending on the situation and the reaction that occurred, some students may choose to include how they could attempt to improve the situation or react differently



Activity 6: Causes of Stress



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

This activity will require students to identify the various stresses they experience and categorize this stress into what they can and cannot control (e.g. internal versus external stress).

Student Instructions:

Warm Up Activity:

Allow students to jot down some of the things that cause them stress in the list provided in the student worksheet.

External vs. Internal Stress:

Explain to students that when we are dealing with negative stress or distress, it tends to come from two different sources: our external stressors and internal stressors.

- Give a few examples of each type of stressor
- Students will then take stressors from their list and place them into the template sorting them as external or internal stressors
- They will then take time to reflect on the next page



Activity 7: Stress Test



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

The stress test will allow students to identify where their current stress levels are.

Student Instructions:

Have students fill out the stress test. Ask them to think about the last 2 - 3 weeks, rather than the year so far. Have students add up their numbers.

Scores:

Under 20 – **Low Stress**

21 - 30 – **Medium Stress**

31 and up – **High Stress**

Let students know that stress is a normal reaction to the demands of life. When your brain perceives a threat, your body releases a burst of hormones to fuel your fight-flight-freeze response and when the threat is gone, your body returns to normal.

Let students know that their stress scores will change depending on life circumstances. Encourage them to continue taking the test in the future to assess their scores at different times and notice how it fluctuates.

Activity 8: Coping Strategies



Time Requirement
30 - 45 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

This activity is to introduce students to the variety of ways we can cope with stress and build the understanding that some may be healthier than others. For reference, some examples of coping strategies:

Healthy Coping Strategies	Unhealthy Coping Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exercise• Talking about the problem• Healthy eating• Relaxation techniques• Spending time with family and friends• Video games (used responsibly)• Good sleep• Taking a break• Music/books• Ask for help	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Procrastination• Staying up too late• Social withdrawal• Overeating• Drug or alcohol use• Caffeine or energy drinks• Physical violence or aggression• Not talking about feelings or holding everything in

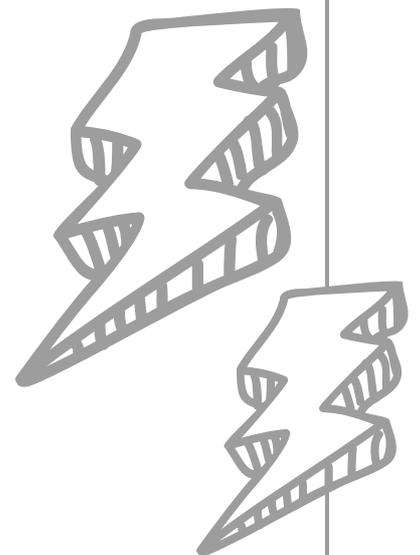
Activity 8: Coping Strategies (cont.)

Student Instructions:

The Right Tool For The Situation Activity:

- As a group, brainstorm as many coping strategies as students can think of. Create a master list somewhere students can view it. Ensure there is a variety of strategies on the list
- Help students categorize healthy versus unhealthy strategies ensuring they understand the difference. Explain how unhealthy coping can feel useful at the moment but in reality, it can increase stress further on
- Student worksheet: Once students understand the variety of coping strategies that they can use, they can identify the right tool for various stressful situations

It is important to remember that we need a variety of coping strategies as we experience many different types of stress.



Activity 9: Stress Management Journaling



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Journal (optional), pencils, and white paper

Activity Information

Journaling can provide students with reflective time to sort their thoughts and identify their feelings. It can be helpful to incorporate journaling regularly because stress management is something that should be practiced often. Journaling also helps students identify and manage their feelings independently.

Student Instructions:

- Give students a journal prompt and time to reflect. You can open up opportunities to share at the end or keep student responses private
- Some students may find it hard to journal for a longer period. The more journaling is practiced, the better their endurance will be

Journal Prompts:

- "I am grateful for..."
- Make a list of 5 things that make you happy. How can you use this list to make you feel better when you feel upset?
- The things that help me the most right now are
- Colour, symbol, image: Pick a colour, a symbol (think simply like an emoji), then an image that describes how you are feeling and why

Activity 4: Stress Management Journaling (cont.)

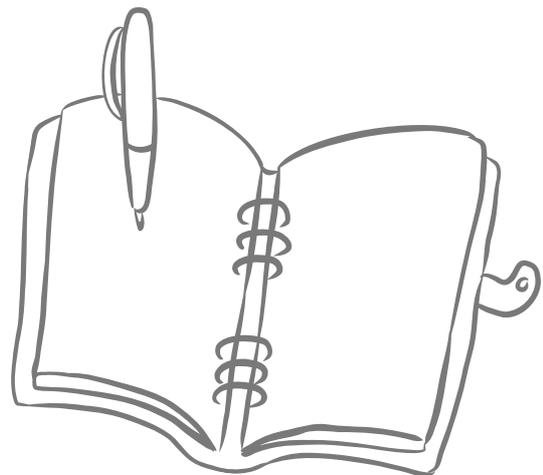
- Think about the day you had yesterday. Was it a good day or bad? How could you have changed the outlook of the day?
- Write down one word that you can focus on today to have the best possible day. Why did you choose this word?
- Think about the last problem you overcame. How did you solve that problem? Are you happy with the outcome?
- I feel most challenged by _____. I feel most supported by _____.
- Compass Points

North: I **N**eed to know _____

East: I am **E**xcited by _____

South: My **S**uggestions for dealing with stress are _____

West: I am **W**orried about _____



Activity 10: Expressing Emotions



Time Requirement
45 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, coloured pencils, or markers

Activity Information

Emotion charades are a great way to strengthen the understanding of emotions, as well as how to express and recognize emotions in yourself and others.

Student Instructions:

Warm Up Activity:

- Reference to the emotions list on the student worksheet and brainstorm more emotions with the students if needed
- Students should be in small groups of 2 - 3 students
- Remind students of the rules of charades (e.g. no talking, using actions and expressions only, partner guesses what you are acting)
- Each student will act out 3 different emotions for their partners to guess

Debrief:

- What helped you understand the emotion your partner displayed?
- Was there anything challenging about this activity?
- What would you do if someone wasn't showing an obvious emotion, but you still thought they were upset? How would you know something was upsetting them?
- Why is it important to express what you are feeling?

Activity 10: Expressing Emotions (cont.)



Activity Information

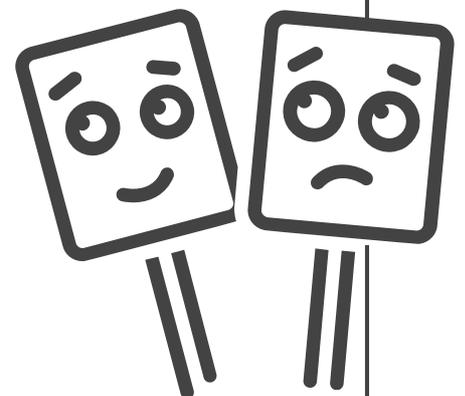
Students will identify various emotions they experience. Using colours and patterns, students will demonstrate how these emotions feel, giving them a better understanding of each emotion.

Student Instructions:

- Students should pick 5 emotions that feel strong or relevant to them. They should brainstorm how they think about this emotion, what it feels like, and if they associate any colours or symbols with the emotion
- Students will have a wheel with 5 spots for their emotions. They should write one emotion in each spot, then think about how they would like to represent that emotion
- Students will use colours, images, patterns, or words to fill in each spot. Encourage students to think more abstractly and build a deeper connection to each emotion

Debrief:

- Why is it important to identify and understand your emotions?
- How can you use this information to help you manage your stress?



Activity II: Track My Mood



Time Requirement
Best assigned as homework, or completed periodically over time



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

This worksheet will allow students to record their moods throughout various times of the day. It can allow them to acknowledge emotions and recognize patterns in behaviour.

To be successful, students must understand the various ways stress or other emotions can represent themselves in their bodies (e.g. physically, behaviours, etc.)

Student Instructions:

- At various points throughout your day, reflect on your current mood. If possible, try to identify why you are feeling that way
- Once you have completed this a couple of times, you may be able to recognize patterns

Activity 12: Affirmations



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

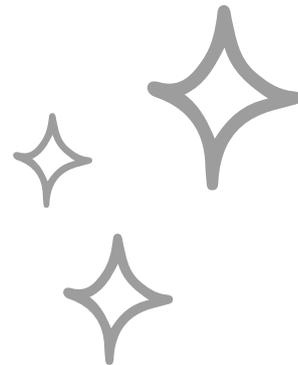
Activity Information

Positive affirmations help build positive self-talk, boost self-esteem, and reduce anxiety. It is important to practice affirmations regularly to get the benefits.¹

This worksheet allows students to practice using affirmations in a simple format.

Student Instructions:

- Reflect on your strengths and positive attributes. It can be helpful to start with “I Am” statements, but affirmations can take any form
- In each spoke of the sun, identify an affirmation about yourself



¹Mindtool. 2022. Using Affirmations to Harness Positive Energy. Retrieved from <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/affirmations.htm#:~:text=Affirmations%20are%20positive%20statements%20that,start%20to%20make%20positive%20changes.>

Activity 13: Stress Bucket



Time Requirement
30 - 45 minutes



Materials Required
Cups (some with and without holes)
Access to water, bin for overflow

Activity Information

This activity provides a visual representation of how coping strategies can impact stress levels.

Stress Bucket Interactive Demonstration²

- A stress bucket represents the stress we carry with us. We all have different levels of stress in our buckets
- Fill a cup (e.g. stress bucket) with water. There are a variety of examples to demonstrate.
 - Step 1: Fill a cup with some water, representing a small stressor
 - Step 2: Fill the same cup with more water, representing a bigger challenge or stressor
 - Step 3: Fill a cup with holes with water. These holes represent healthy coping strategies
 - Step 4: Fill two cups of water at the same time. This represents how unhealthy coping strategies can feel as though they are helping at the moment but they don't reduce the impact of the stress overall
- After each step, pause for discussion
 - o What is happening and how does this represent stress?
 - o What are examples of healthy or unhealthy coping strategies that could be represented in this activity?

² The bucket analogy is based on the following resources: Carver, C.S., Scheier, M.F., & Weintraub, J.K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: A theoretically based approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56, 267-283. Ross, S.E., Niebling, B.C., & Heckert, T.M. (1999). Sources of stress among college students. *College Student Journal*, 33, 312-317.

Activity 13: Stress Bucket (cont.)



Take some time to debrief with students and share the Stress Bucket video to wrap up and confirm understanding.

Here are two videos demonstrating the same concept. Always preview videos before sharing with students.



Braive: Stress Bucket <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KYC5SsJjx8>



MindWell: Stress Bucket <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrfYcNFKi3A>

Alternative Stress Bucket Activity

- Use the corresponding student worksheet if you would like an alternative to the interactive demonstration or would like an additional resource to expand student knowledge
- The student worksheet allows students to identify and reflect on their own stress bucket levels



Activity 14: : Stress Structure



Time Requirement
60 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pipe cleaners, dice, weights, and pencils

Activity Information

This activity simulates the impact of stress on a person. Students will be able to understand the various impacts stress has on a person, as well as the benefits of using coping strategies to deal with stress.

Students should also understand the definition of resiliency, the ability to bounce back or overcome challenges faced. This activity can be a good way to deepen their understanding.

Materials:

- Building materials such as pipe cleaners
- Small blocks or weights (to represent stress)
- Dice for each group
- Student worksheet for each group

The goal of the activity is to use the pipe cleaners to build a structure that can stand on its own, even under the weight of stress. This structure represents someone who is dealing with stress.

Student Instructions:

- Students should work in small groups (around 4 per group)
- Each group will need 6 pipe cleaners, a dice, weights, and one set of cards
- Cards provided in the student worksheet should be cut out, mixed, and placed into two piles (coping strategy/develop resiliency cards and stress/remove coping strategy cards). Extra pipe cleaners will be also be needed throughout the activity
- Students should start by building a small structure with the 6 pipe cleaners

Activity 14: Stress Structure (cont.)

- Students will roll the dice and pick cards based on whether the roll was odd/even. The cards will determine the situations that person is facing, and as a result, how you build your pipe cleaner structure
- There are 4 rounds. For each round, someone will roll the dice 3 times
- Assign each group a "roll master" to keep track of each roll on the student worksheet



a) **Even** (2, 4, or 6): Pick a coping strategy card

i. Add a pipe cleaner to strengthen the structure



ii. Within the coping strategy pile, there will be a few "develop



resiliency" cards. If students pick this card, instead of adding a pipe cleaner, they can rebuild their structure. This demonstrates they have overcome or bounced back from the challenges they have faced so far



b) **Odd** (1, 3, or 5): Pick a stress card

i. Add a weight to represent increased stress



ii. Within the stress pile, there will be a few "remove coping strategy"



cards. If students pick this card, they will add a weight to their structure. This demonstrates that the removal of a healthy coping strategy can increase stress

Example:

A 6 is rolled. Since 6 is an even number, a student will pick up a coping strategy card. The card may say that a student talked to a teacher about the upcoming test to reduce their stress. Students will then add one pipe cleaner to their structure.

A 3 is rolled. Since 3 is an odd number, a student will pick up a stress card. The card may say that too much homework is causing feelings of stress. Students will then add a weight to their structure.

Activity 14: Stress Structure (cont.)

Extra Tip:

If students need extra support, have them all roll at the same time, and wait for groups to be organized (e.g. have added their supports or stress) before moving to the next step. If students are working well, they can move to the next step independently.

Debrief:

- Have students share what happened to their structure and what types of roles and situations they experienced
- Highlight some of the groups that had more 'stressful' experiences (e.g. rolling the dice a negative number, adding more weight to their structure or removing a coping strategy), but still have intact structures. This can show how we can be resilient even in the face of challenges

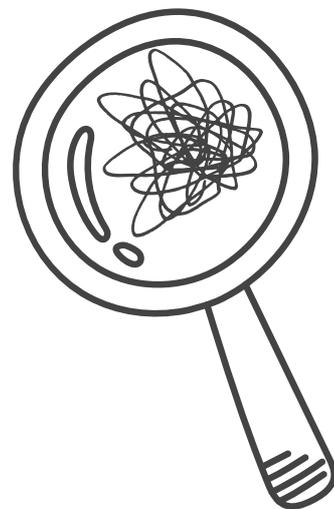
Optional Video Resource:



Brains: Journey to Resilience <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrFYcNFKi3A>

Discuss as a group the following:

- How does this activity relate to resiliency?
- What did we learn from this activity?



Activity 15: Progress Chart



Time Requirement
Best done over time



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

This activity is a way for students to set goals around supporting their mental health and measure their progress across various categories including getting active, building connections, being mindful, expressing emotions, and giving back.

Student Instructions:

- For each category, brainstorm ideas that are meaningful to you
- Each time a task is completed add a sticker or check mark



Topic

Mental Health
Awareness

Mental Health Awareness

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to understand the various ways they can support their mental health, identify the signs of mental illness, and understand the stigma surrounding mental illness and its impact.



Topic Overview:

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes their potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, do well, and fully enjoy life.

Everyone has mental health

Mental health is not just about the absence of mental illness. Just as everyone has physical health (even with a cold or a broken leg), everyone has mental health even when dealing with stress or being diagnosed with a mental illness.

What is Mental Illness?

Mental illness is a change in thinking, mood, or behaviour, accompanied by distress and impaired functioning over time. Mental illness is a medical condition diagnosed by qualified mental health professionals.

Examples of Mental Illness

- Mood Disorders (Depression and Bipolar Disorder)
- Anxiety Disorders (Generalized Anxiety, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)
- Psychotic Disorders (Schizophrenia)
- Substance-Related Disorders
- Eating Disorders (Anorexia and Bulimia)

Relationship Between Mental Health and Mental Illness

Mental Health Pyramid

Mental health encompasses the entire pyramid. Everyone exists somewhere on the pyramid and everyone has mental health.



No Distress, Problem, or Distress

Everything is going fine and you are generally enjoying life.

Mental Distress

Mental distress occurs when someone encounters everyday problems that create a stress response. These are common, expected, and normal responses that are necessary for adaptation and building resilience (e.g. writing a test, arguing).

Mental Health Issues

This occurs when a person is faced with a larger stressor than usual. These are difficult times that may require additional support but often do not require medical treatment (e.g. dealing with the death of a loved one, or the loss of a relationship).

Mental Disorder

A mental disorder or illness is a medical condition with specific criteria diagnosed by trained health professionals.

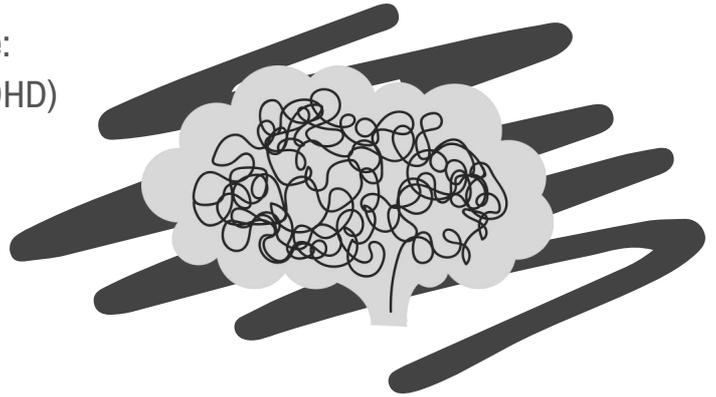
What is Neurodiversity?



Neurodiversity is the idea that there are natural variations in how brains are wired and function especially related to learning, sociability, mood, attention, and other mental functions.

Examples of neurodivergent conditions include:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Dyslexia
- Dyscalculia
- Dyspraxia



Causes of Mental Illness

Neurotransmitter Theory:

Neurons communicate and send messages to each other through chemicals called neurotransmitters. Mental illness can occur when there is an imbalance in brain chemistry.

Genetic Predisposition:

If a family member has a mental illness they may pass on the susceptibility to the illness through genetic material. It is important to note that not all mental illnesses have a genetic link and having a genetic link doesn't guarantee you will experience the mental illness.

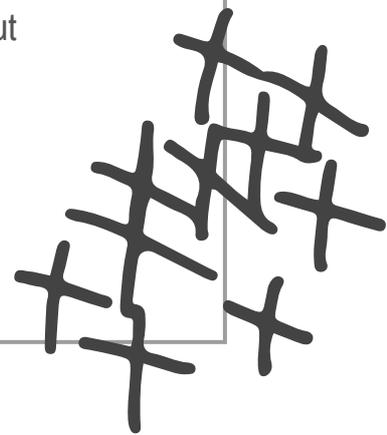
Environmental Factors:

These may include alcohol, drugs, abuse, loss, death, bullying, physical illness, stress, trauma, natural disaster, extreme poverty, or adverse childhood experiences. Environmental factors alone may not cause a mental illness but they can make them worse.

The key point for students to understand is that there are many ways in which mental illness can occur.

Impacts of Mental Illness

Thinking	Mood	Behaviour
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive worries or fears • Experiencing confused thinking or a reduced ability to concentrate • Thinking something is wrong with you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling sad or anxious • Being confused or frustrated • Feeling sensitive or irritable • Overwhelmed easily • Extreme moods or mood swings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming withdrawn or isolated • Losing interest in activities usually enjoyed • Being less productive • Acting out



What Is Stigma?

Stigma is the negative attitudes and beliefs that motivate the general public to fear, reject, avoid, or discriminate against people with mental health problems and mental illness. It can include discrediting or showing prejudice against someone because of a characteristic they have (e.g. using words like psycho, nuts, or crazy to refer to someone with mental health problems or mental illness).

Stigma can result in youth feeling shame, guilt, or being afraid to talk about their experiences and can lead to increased spread of misinformation over time.



Stomp Out Stigma



Language Matters

Pay attention to the words you use and whether they help or hurt. Be mindful of words such as "crazy" as they can perpetuate negative ideas about mental illness.



Educate Yourself

Learn more about mental illness including the facts and fiction.



Be Kind

Treat a person with mental illness with kindness just as you would people with any other illness.



Educate Others

Talk about mental illness with friends, family, peers, coworkers, and teammates.



Check out the following video for your own education or to share with students:



Have that Talk - Reducing Stigma: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eio-l8PbdDk>

Please always preview videos before sharing them with students.

Stigma Self-Assessment³

Before you engage your students in learning about mental health, take some time to check your personal attitudes towards mental health and mental illness and understand whether stigma has affected any of your perceptions.

Examine the following statements:

- "People should work out their own mental health problems."
- "People with mental illness are generally violent and dangerous."
- "You can tell by looking at people whether they have a mental illness."
- "The term mental illness is used as an excuse for bad behaviour."
- "Mental Illness only happens to certain kinds of people."
- "Most people will never be affected by mental illness."

If you agreed with any of these statements, your perception of mental health and mental illness may be impacted by stigmatizing information. Take some time to read the facts here:

People should work out their own mental health problems.

False

Just as you would go to a doctor for a physical illness, sometimes we need professional assistance for a mental illness.

People with mental illnesses are generally violent and dangerous.

False

People with mental illness are generally no more violent than the rest of the population.

You can tell by looking at someone if they have a mental illness.

False

Generally, no, you cannot tell if someone has a mental illness based on appearance.

The term mental illness is used as an excuse for bad behaviour.

False

Mental illness is a diagnosable health concern, plus many people can live productive and successful lives with a mental illness.

Mental illness only happens to certain kinds of people.

False

Mental illness occurs due to a variety of reasons and can happen to anyone.

Most people will never be affected by mental illness.

False

1 in 5 people in Canada will have a mental illness. Everyone will be affected by mental illness at some point whether it is by having the experience themselves or by knowing someone with a mental illness.

Note:

This self-assessment is designed for teachers to check their assumptions. Use the Mental Health Fact vs. Fiction for students.
(Activity #8, page 54)

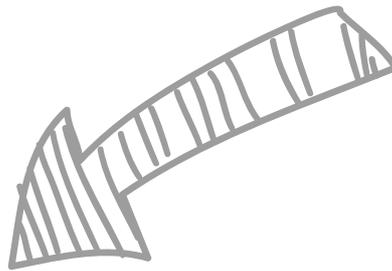


Pathways to Recovery

- Seek help from trusted professionals
- Medication
- Learn more about mental health concerns and mental illness
- Explore therapeutic techniques
- Build a strong support team
- Practice self-care

Activities:

- 1: What is Mental Health?
- 2: Mental Health Vocabulary
- 3: Mental Health Spectrum
- 4: Iceberg
- 5: Signs of Mental Illness
- 6: Lego Activity
- 7: Someone Else's Shoes
- 8: Mental Health Fact vs. Fiction
- 9: Stigma
- 10: Mental Health Origami Conversation Starter
- 11: Wellness Wheel
- 12: Gratitude
- 13: Resiliency
- 14: Mindfulness
- 15: Community of Support
- 16: Mini Books



Activity 1: What is Mental Health?



Time Requirement
15 - 30 minutes



Materials Required
White paper, pencils (optional)

Activity Information

Use this activity to assess where students' knowledge level and attitudes around mental health currently exist. Some misinformation or gaps in understanding may present themselves. This isn't the time to correct every assumption, but instead, note areas where students may need more support or knowledge.

Student Instructions:

- **THINK** – Students first individually brainstorm ideas that come to mind when they think about mental health.
- **PAIR** – They then get into partners or small groups and discuss what they have come up with.
- **SHARE** – Activity wraps up with a class discussion about what was brainstormed individually and as a group.



Activity 2: Mental Health Vocabulary



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
None

Activity Information

This activity allows students to learn and understand common words or phrases associated with mental health. This can be important to lay the groundwork for other activities.

Student Instructions:

Have students brainstorm words or phrases associated with mental health. These can be things they already understand or things they want to learn more about.

Go through the words and ensure that students understand the terms. If there are any that seem unclear, students should brainstorm as a group what that word means in the context of mental health.

Suggested Words:

- Stress
- Stigma
- Balance
- Mental illness
- Health or healthy
- Emotional
- Well-being

Students may bring up words related to mental illness. This can be a good time to begin discussions around the relationship between mental health and mental illness.

Further activities can be used to introduce more learning about mental illness and stigma.

Activity 3: Mental Health Spectrum



Time Requirement
30 - 45 minutes



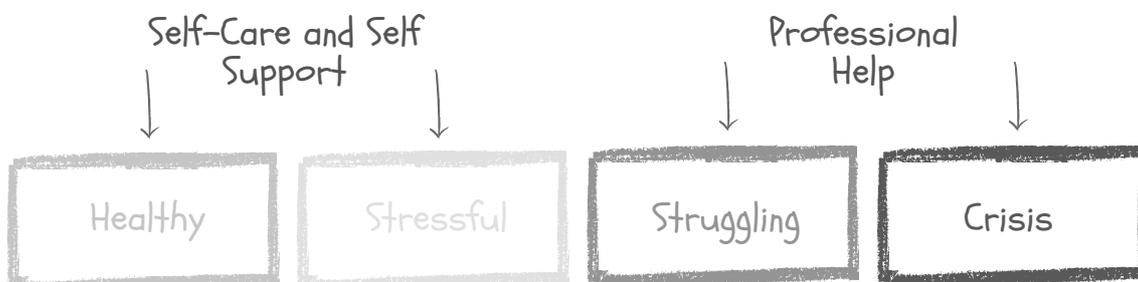
Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

This activity builds the idea that health is more complicated than good or bad, sick or healthy through the use of the mental health spectrum.

Student Instructions:

- Introduce the mental health spectrum to students⁴
 - o Everyone has mental health and it can be helpful to think of mental health as being on a spectrum. Depending on what we are going through, our health can shift
 - o When something stressful happens, our mental health may shift to the right. When we do something that calms us or makes us healthy, it might shift to the left
 - o The spectrum can be a helpful visual to understand that a mental health struggle may feel intense and challenging, but there are always ways to shift our mental health positively



Activity 3: Mental Health Spectrum

- It can be helpful to use a physical health example to help students understand the spectrum
 - o Getting a good sleep might move you into the green and staying up super late might move you to the yellow
 - o Breaking your leg could move you into the orange, but once you see a doctor, you could be in the green with your cast on (you are still healthy with a broken leg!)

⁴ YouthSMART. Mental Health and Mental Illness. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from <https://www.youthsmart.ca/mental-health-mental-illness/mental-illness/>.

Activity 4: Iceberg



Time Requirement
30 - 45 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

This activity helps students to identify that there is often more to a person than can be easily seen. When it comes to stress or mental health problems, individuals may have to dig deeper to understand what a person is going through.

Discussion Questions:

- What are some things that people wouldn't know about you if they didn't ask?
- Can people tell if you are having a bad day?
- Have you ever hidden how you were feeling from the surface?

Student Instructions:

- Sometimes certain things about us are not so easily seen. Think about a time when you felt a certain way, but it wasn't obvious to those around you
- We have to understand that we don't always know what is going on with everyone around us and we can't assume that we know the full story
- Use the student worksheet to brainstorm things people know about you and things that may not immediately be obvious

Activity 5: Signs of Mental Illness



Time Requirement
30 - 45 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

Students must understand the various signs of mental illness. Mental illness often affects someone's thinking, mood, or behaviour.

Mental illnesses are diagnosed by qualified mental health professionals. Mental illness looks different for everyone, but mental illness can be **any major change from what was once typical**.

Student Instructions:

- Students use the worksheet to brainstorm how mental illness can impact someone's thinking, mood, or behaviour
- Once students fill out the worksheet individually or in groups, discuss answers and clarify any questions students may have

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it important to understand the signs of mental illness?
- Does having one or two of these signs automatically mean someone has a mental illness?
- What can you do if you recognize these signs in a friend or family member?

Activity 6: LEGO Activity



Time Requirement
30 - 45 minutes



Materials Required
LEGO or other small item, dice

Activity Information

This activity helps students understand that everyone has different strengths and different needs. It builds the connection that everyone needs different supports to be successful.

Student Instructions:

- Have students complete a simple task that you know all students will be able to accomplish (e.g. writing their name with a marker, or tying a shoe)
 - Ask them how that task felt for them and most students will consider it easy
- This task represents completing basic life tasks or dealing with normal stressors or challenges
- Then students are randomly assigned challenges.
 - Option – Roll a die to find out how many LEGO pieces they get
- Have them hold the pieces of LEGO in their hand.
 - At this moment is it hard to hold? Most students will say no or might be experiencing small challenges holding onto it depending on how many they got or the size of the LEGO
 - Remind students that the LEGO represents mental health challenges they might experience. We all experience different levels at various times. And we all react differently to these challenges

If LEGO pieces are small, you may want to roll the dice twice to make the activity more effective.

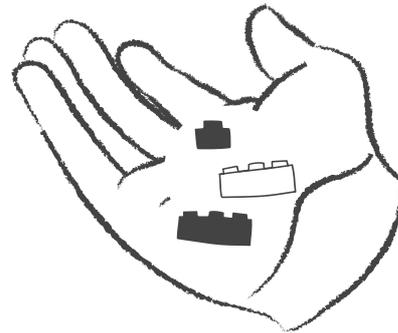


Activity 6: LEGO Activity (cont.)

- Now have them hold the LEGO and try to do the simple task again
 - o How did they feel this time? Ask students who had various numbers of LEGO's to compare their experiences
- Have students help to brainstorm mental health supports
- Roll a die to see how many supports they have. This number allows them to put down a certain amount of LEGO. This can represent social support or treatments. Not all of the LEGO should be out of their hand, but perhaps now they can manage better
- Have them try the task again. It still might be difficult but it should be easier. Plus, over time they would be more comfortable, skilled, or adapted to doing the task with the LEGO in hand

Debrief:

- What happened and why?
- How does this relate to mental health?



Reminder:

We all face different experiences and we all need different supports as a result.

Activity 7: Someone Else's Shoes



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

Empathy: The ability to understand what others feel, see things from their point of view, and imagine yourself in their place. Essentially it is putting yourself in someone else's position and feeling what they are feeling.⁵

Warm Up Activity:

- Empathy is easier when students have developed relationships with each other
- Use an icebreaker activity if you feel students would benefit from spending some time learning more about their classmates

Examples of Icebreakers:

- Get to know someone bingo
- Cross The Line activity (page 78)
- A great wind blows

Student Instructions:

- Students will work through the various situations and decide how they may feel if that happened to them
- Once students are complete, they should compare answers with a partner or small group. This will allow them to see the different emotions someone may feel in the same scenario

Activity 7: Someone Else's Shoes (cont.)

Debrief:

- Were any situations difficult to pair with an emotion?
- Are there situations in which people disagreed on what emotion would be felt? Why?
- Are there any 'wrong' emotions?



⁵ Cherry, K. (2022, July 21). What is empathy?. Very well Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-empathy-2795562>.

Activity 8: Mental Health Fact vs. Fiction



Time Requirement
30 - 45 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet

Activity Information

This activity can demonstrate where students are unclear about mental health knowledge and introduce discussion around common misconceptions about mental health and mental illness.

Mental Health: A state of well-being in which every individual realizes their potential, can cope with normal stresses of life, work productively, do well, and enjoy life.

Mental health is the way children think and feel about themselves and the world around them. It affects how children cope with life's challenges and stresses.⁶



Mental Illness: A change in thinking, mood, or behaviour, accompanied by distress or impaired functioning over time.

- Explain that mental illness is like other physical illnesses – except the mind doesn't feel well
- Not every bad feeling is a symptom of mental illness (all feelings, both comfortable and uncomfortable, are part of being human)

⁶ Raising Children Network (2022). Good Mental Health for Children. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/health-daily-care/mental-health/children-s-mental-health#:~:text=Mental%20health%20is%20the%20way,with%20life's%20challenges%20and%20stresses.>

⁷ Campbell, L. (2021, December 6). How to Speak with Your Kid About Mental Health. Psych Central. <https://psychcentral.com/health/parent-central-how-to-talk-with-your-kid-about-mental-illness.>

Activity 8: Mental Health Fact vs Fiction (cont.)

Student Instructions:

- To introduce this activity, ask students what the difference between mental health and mental illness is. A variety of answers may be given
- Have students start in the middle of the room. Read out a statement and have students walk from one side of the room if they believe it is fact and another if it is fiction
- If space is an issue, you can also have students stand for a fact and remain seated for fiction. Ensure students know it is okay if they get answers incorrect

Debrief:

This activity can help clarify some of the different ideas surrounding mental health and mental illness.

It is important to give students time to ask questions or for clarification about any of the statements that were brought up.

- Did anything surprise you?
- Why do you think some of these false statements exist? How can we prevent this?

Activity 4: Stigma Telephone Game



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
May change depending on the activity chosen, white paper, and pencils

Activity Information

This activity aims to demonstrate how misinformation can be repeated and spread. While the misinformation is a silly statement or image in this activity, students can begin to draw the connection to the impact that would be felt if it was a serious topic or information that could hurt someone.

Student Instructions:



Versions of Telephone Game

Classic:

- Start with everyone sitting in a circle
- Player 1 whispers a phrase into player 2's ear
- The message gets repeated as it goes around the circle. Once it has made its whole way around the circle the message is said out loud and compared to the original message

Drawing:

- The first player draws the clue. The next player writes a sentence describing that image. They then fold the paper so that the drawing is not seen
- Players always alternate between writing or drawing
- Once everyone has had a turn, compare the final result to the original idea

Activity 4: Stigma Telephone Game (cont.)

Charades:

- Students stand in a line, all facing one direction
- Player 1 (back of the line) gets a phrase they must act out
- When they are ready, they tap on the player in front of their shoulder (player 2). That player turns around and player 1 acts out the phrase to player 2.
- All other players should have their backs to this interaction
- Player 2 then taps on the player in front of them (player 3) and again acts out the phrase
- In the end, compare the final action to the first phrase

Debrief:

- How did the message change over time?
- Although this is a fun lighthearted game, how could this impact someone if the message was a serious topic or information that could hurt someone?
- How does this relate to the mental health fact versus fiction activity?
 - For example, some of these statements may have started as harmless comments that spread over time
 - Or a statement may have been based on something true, but over time has shifted into misinformation

Reminder:

Stigma is negative attitudes or disapproval towards someone. Because of stigma and a lack of understanding, many students don't know how to get help or can be embarrassed to discuss their feelings. We can reduce stigma by normalizing conversations about mental health, educating ourselves and others, and watching our language or the words used to talk about mental illness.

Activity 10: Mental Health Origami Conversation Starter



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, scissors

Activity Information

It is important to have conversations about mental health and mental illness. This reduces stigma and increases healthy behaviour as well as reaching out for support.

The origami conversation starters can be used as an extra tool to increase mental health conversations among students.

Included is an example you can print, fold, and use, or a blank template for students to create their own.

Conversation Starter Ideas:

- What does a good mental health day look like for you?
- How do you pick yourself up after a challenging day?
- When I am upset it looks and feels like _____. How does it look for you?
- What does mental health mean to you?
- What do you do to take care of your mental health?
- Do you think mental health is as important as physical health? Why?
- Who can you go to if you are needing extra support?
- How can I help you if you are struggling?
- How can you tell if someone needs support?
- What are some healthy ways you cope with stress or other challenges?
- What do you wish someone knew about you?
- How do you cheer yourself up?
- What are 3 things you are grateful for?

Activity 10: Mental Health Origami Conversation Starter

- How are you really doing?
- What was challenging about today?
- What are you looking forward to this week?
- If you could change anything in your life, what would it be?
- What makes you feel calm?
- Is there anything you'd like to talk about?

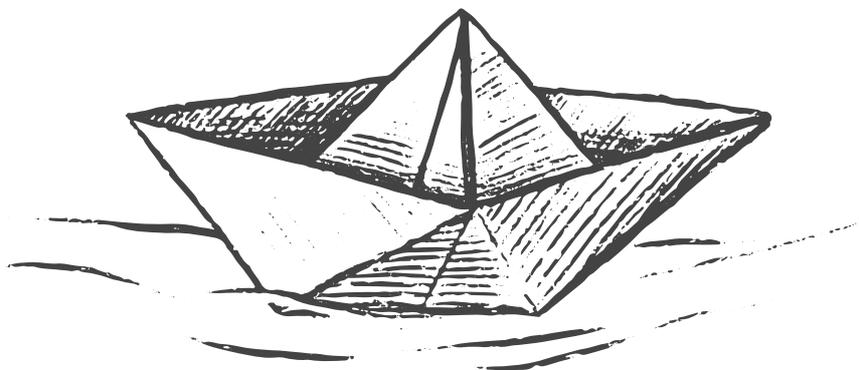
How To Use:

- Students should work in pairs to ask each other one question, then swap partners. This continues on for as many rounds as desired
- Pick a colour and open the page the number of times corresponding to the letters in that colour. For example, the colour blue has four letters, so you would move the paper four times
- Then pick a number and move the paper that many times
- Then pick a final number, open it, and start the conversation based on the prompt

Video Resource:



Folding and Movement Instructions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrYcNFKi3A>



Activity 11: Wellness Wheel



Time Requirement
30 - 45 minutes



Materials Required
Optional student worksheet,
markers

Activity Information

There is a worksheet that can be used as an alternative to this activity, for kids to do on their own, or if the space does not allow for the chart paper version.

Student Instructions:

- Students will walk around the room and list as many ideas as possible on how to take care of themselves under each category
 - o For example, under physical wellness, they may write “go for a walk” and for emotional wellness, they might write “listen to music”. It is okay if some ideas are in more than one category, as things can help more than one area of our wellness
 - o If the answer is already written, students can add a checkmark or smiley face beside it, but should be encouraged to try and add new suggestions



Activity 11: Wellness Wheel (cont.)

Dimensions of Wellness

Environmental

Living in and supporting a clean and safe environment.
(e.g. Going for a walk or cleaning your room)



Occupational

Satisfaction with career or academic work, feeling safe and secure in the job or school environment, financial security.
(e.g. Doing homework, or asking for help from your teacher)



Emotional

Positive feelings, optimistic view on life, ability to express and process emotions. (e.g. Listening to music, or journaling)



Intellectual

Stimulated with activities, growing knowledge and abilities, and learning new skills. (e.g. Reading a book, or trying a new hobby)



Activity 11: Wellness Wheel (cont.)

Dimensions of Wellness

Physical



Physical health and activities.
(e.g. Going for a walk, or getting a good night's sleep)

Social



Positive connection and relationships with family, friends, and community;
supporting others and asking for help when needed.
(e.g. Making plans with friends, or spending time with a pet)

Spiritual



Connections to one's meaning and purpose
(e.g. Mindfulness or volunteering)

Activity 12: Gratitude



Time Requirement
Varies, depending on the activity format. See notes for more information.



Materials Required
Varies – whiteboard, markers, white paper, optional student worksheet

Activity Information

Gratitude means more than saying thank you. Instead, it is focusing on what is good in your life and being thankful for the things you have.

Gratitude Benefits:⁸

- **Physical:** Stronger immune systems, lower blood pressure, increased participation in exercise, and other activities that take care of your health
- **Psychological:** Higher levels of positive emotions, reduced anxiety and depression, increased optimism and happiness
- **Social:** Greater generosity and compassion, increased capacity for forgiveness, fewer feelings of loneliness and isolation

Gratitude Activity: Classroom Compliments Project

Student Instructions:

- Have one individual sit in front of the whiteboard or another surface that can be written on. They should be facing away so they cannot see the board
- The rest of the students will come up and write a compliment or a reason they are grateful for that person on the whiteboard. Over time the individual will be surrounded by positive compliments
- Once complete, the individual should turn around and read what is written about them
- **Bonus:** Take a picture of them sitting with the compliments behind them so they can keep the photo

Activity 12: Gratitude (cont.)

Notes:

- This is a project best done once the students know each other well
- It is important to have a conversation about the types of comments that are respectful and appropriate and that there is no tolerance for anything unkind
- Students may resort to vague comments such as “you are nice,” especially for students they aren’t as close with. Encourage kids to dig deep and write something more personal
- Depending on class size, this may be something you do over various days or weeks, picking a few students at a time
 - Alternative options include: Passing paper with the students' names on top so everyone works simultaneously or "Valentine" style, where the students make a box or envelope to drop off notes. This will make it harder to keep an eye on what students are writing so only do this format if you trust it will remain respectful and appropriate

Additional Gratitude Practices:

- **Gratitude Journal:** Write down 1 - 3 things they are grateful for at the end of each school day
- **Gratitude Circle:** Have a gratitude circle on Friday afternoon in which each student shares something they are grateful for
- **Gratitude Bingo:** Small gratitude tasks to complete (see student worksheet)



⁸ Fountain, S., Lantieri, L., Baker, M., & Zayas King, C. (2017). Nurturing Gratitude from the Inside Out. Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley. https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC_Gratitude_Curriculum_Elem.pdf

Activity 13: Resiliency



Time Requirement
30 - 45 minutes



Materials Required
Pylons, hula hoops, spot markers, white paper, and pencils

Activity Information

Resiliency is the ability to bounce back after challenging circumstances. We all face difficult situations, but resiliency is about facing a challenge and trying again. It is a skill that takes practice.

Student Instructions:

Warmup Activity:

Have students write a couple of sentences down using their non-dominant hand.

- What happened
- What did you feel?
- What internal thoughts were you facing?
- How did you overcome these thoughts?
- Did it become easier over time?
- How does this relate to resilience?

Teamwork Challenge:

- Have students participate in a teamwork challenge. This will put their resiliency to the test. They may face challenges or setbacks but must figure out a way to proceed
- Try out the Hot Chocolate River teamwork challenge on the next page

Activity 13: Resiliency (cont.)

Hot Chocolate River Instructions:

- Have two markers (pylons, rope, etc.) a good distance apart (~20 feet). This marks the banks of the hot chocolate river
- Have students line up on one side. They must get their team across the hot chocolate river, but it is too deep and too hot to swim or walk across
- The only safe way to get across is to use the marshmallows provided (hula hoops, spot markers, etc.)
- The current in the river is so strong it will sweep the marshmallow away if someone is not holding it or stepping onto it
- Once marshmallows are placed in the river they begin to melt, so they cannot be picked up and moved to a different spot

Video Resource:



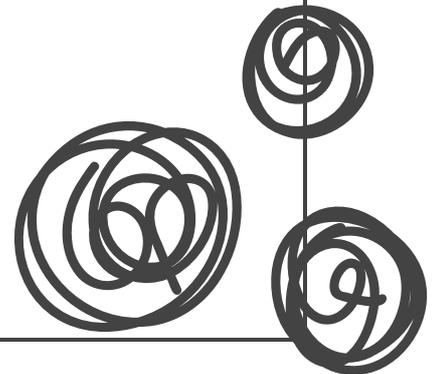
Hot Chocolate River Instructions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4RnyNiJhpA>

Tips:

- The number of marshmallows you should give the group will depend on the team size and space you are using. You do not want to give too many as it will be too easy, but too few will be a challenge. Try 8 or 9
- Keep an eye on the marshmallows and be prepared to sweep them away if no one is touching them
- Allow groups to try the challenge and to start over and re-group if necessary. If groups are struggling, you may need to add more marshmallows

Debrief:

- What worked? What didn't work?
- Did you notice signs of resilient behaviour?
- How can we apply this to real-life situations?



Activity 14: Mindfulness



Time Requirement
15 minutes



Materials Required
White paper, pencils, and drawing materials

Activity Information

Mindfulness is taking the time to slow down, pay attention, and become aware of one's thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations.

Mindfulness is impactful in the classroom as it helps students focus, regulate emotions, reduce stress, and tackle challenges.⁹

There are a variety of ways to incorporate mindfulness into the classroom.

Student Instructions:

5-4-3-2-1 Journaling (5 senses)

This activity is helpful because of its variety of applications. It can be a quick grounding exercise without pen and paper, or it can be a written/drawing exercise.



5 Things
I Can See



4 Things
I Can Feel



3 Things
I Can Hear



2 Things
I Can Smell



1 Thing
I Can Taste

Mindfulness works best when it is practiced often. Find activities that work for your students and make them a part of your classroom's routine.

Additional ways to incorporate mindfulness in the classroom:

- YouTube videos, breathing exercises, journaling, calm place visualization

9 Mindful Schools. Research on Mindfulness. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from <https://www.mindfulschools.org/about-mindfulness/research-on-mindfulness/>.

Activity 15: Community of Support



Time Requirement
30 minutes



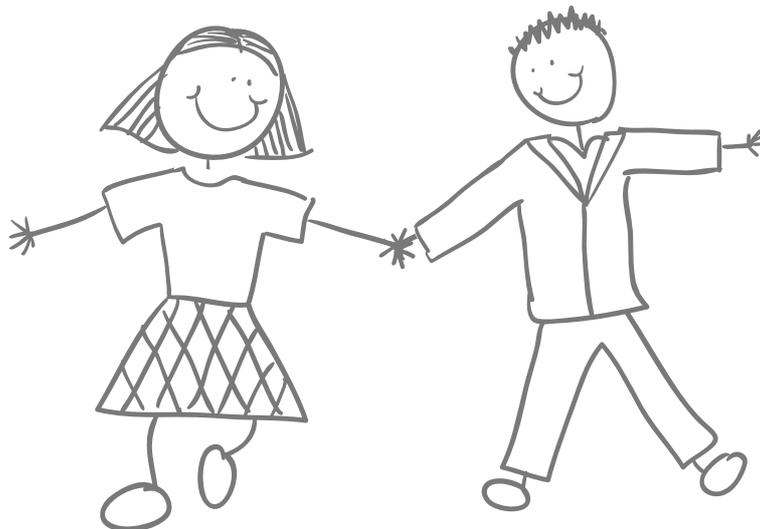
Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

Humans are social people! We rely on others for positive relationships and support during tough times. It is important that we do not attempt to handle all of our challenges on our own.¹⁰

Student Instructions:

- Who can you reach out to for support? It is important to have a variety of people who provide different types of support. For example, a friend may be able to cheer you up on a bad day and a trusted adult may support you more formally
- Use the student worksheet as an opportunity to brainstorm who you can go to for support



¹⁰ YouthNet. (2022). Relationships and Peer Support. <http://ynra.ca/learning-hub/relationships-peer-support/>

Activity 16: Mini Books



Time Requirement
45 minutes



Materials Required
White paper, scissors, pencils, and markers

Activity Information

This activity is an effective way to summarize many of the learnings that come from the Mental Health Awareness section. It is important to ensure students understand the following concepts before beginning this activity:

- Mental health spectrum
- Coping strategies
- How to take care of their mental health
- Who can be a support when in need

Use the following discussion questions to assess and summarize learning.

Discussion Questions:

- What is mental health? What does good mental health look like for you?
- How can we cope with challenging situations? Are all coping strategies healthy? Review the Wellness Wheel if they need examples of how to take care of their mental health
- Who can you go to for support?



Activity 16: Mini Books (cont.)

Student Instructions:

- Students will make mini resource books of the things and people who can support their mental health. This book can be a resource they can carry with them and reference anytime
- Using one sheet of paper, students can make a mini book with 8 pages (including cover and back)

Ideas for the pages include:

- Cover page
- What good mental health looks like for them (2 pages)
- Coping strategies (2 pages)
- People to go to for support
- Phone numbers for organizations/helplines
- Back page

There are videos online explaining how to fold these books. This may be useful for students instead of the written instructions.



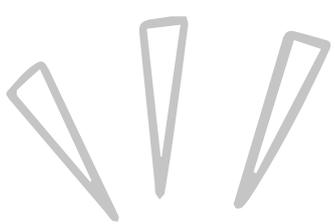
Mini Book Folding Instructions:¹¹

- Fold the paper into 8ths. This can be done by folding the paper first in half long edge folded to the long edge (hotdog/horizontal fold), then folding it in half short edge to short edge (hamburger/vertical fold), and again short edge to short edge (hamburger/vertical fold)
- Unfold the paper. It should be 8 separate sections
- Fold the paper short edge to short edge (hamburger/vertical fold)
- Place the paper so the folded edge is facing you. Cut the paper from the fold to the next section (hotdog/horizontal fold). You are not cutting it the whole way across
- Unfold the paper. There should be a slit down the center of the paper
- Do one more fold from the long edge to the long edge (hotdog/horizontal fold)
- Turn your paper so the cut edge is up in the air. Push the two ends together so it begins to fold into a book

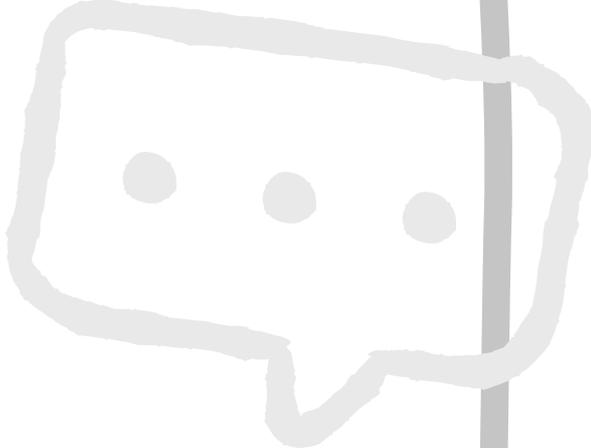
¹¹ Wiki How. (October 8, 2022). How to Make a Paper Book. <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Paper-Book>



Topic



Skills for Being There



Skills for Being There

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to identify when a friend needs help and learn the steps of how to support, develop skills around setting boundaries and understand where to get help for their mental health.



Topic Overview:

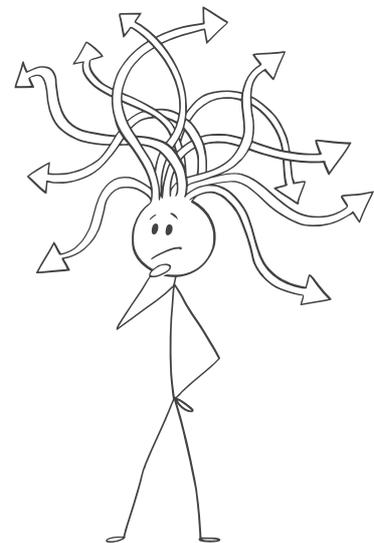
Students will often go to their peers first when experiencing a challenge before they reach out for more formal support (e.g. a parent, teacher, or medical professional). It is important that students not only understand how mental health challenges can affect them but also how to support a friend when they are going through a difficult time.

Mental Health and Mental Illness

To engage in supporting a friend with their mental health, students will require an understanding of what stress and mental health are and how to identify when someone is exhibiting signs of stress or mental illness. It is suggested to start with lessons on Stress Management and Healthy Coping, and Mental Health Awareness as needed.

Warning Signs Someone Needs Help

- Feeling sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks
- Severe or extreme mood swings
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities
- Sudden overwhelming fear sometimes for no reason
- Changes to normal eating or sleeping habits
- Intensified risk-taking



- Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- Drastic changes in personality or behaviour
- Extreme difficulty concentrating, focusing, or staying still
- **Any major change from what was once typical**



Ethics and Confidentiality

There are certainly ethical considerations when supporting a friend:

Confidentiality:

A friend may reach out to you because they trust you. Confidentiality means you respect their privacy and you do not spread what they say to other people.

Responsible behaviour:

Act responsibly in what you do or say when helping.

The rights of your friend/person you are helping:

They have the right to make their own decisions. We cannot force someone to do what we think is right.

How to know when the problem is too big to handle?

Sometimes problems are bigger than students will be able to handle on their own. Ensure they know to get additional support when one of the following situations happens:



You feel threatened or are threatened.



The person you're helping feels threatened or unsafe.



Family or friends in danger.



Situations regarding abuse.



Drugs and/or alcohol addiction.



Situations you feel uncomfortable dealing with.



Situations you are not the expert in.

What Are The Skills for Being There?

#1 Check-In



You can't help a friend unless you check-in and see if they are okay! Tell them you have noticed some changes and ask if they are okay.

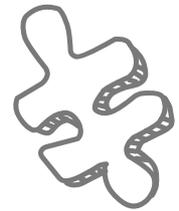
#2 Listen Up



Let them talk and listen actively. Allow them to express how they feel.

#3 Gather Ideas & Weigh the Options

If they want help, help them generate ideas. It is best if they can come up with the ideas themselves with your support. Help them weigh the pros and cons.



#4 Accept their Choices

We want to help our friends make positive choices, but we also have to accept the choices they make.



#5 Show Support

Check-in and connect with them to help if they need it.



Limits and Boundaries

It is okay to set a limit or boundary when helping a friend. Examples may include:

Your Role

You are a friend and not a therapist.



Your Capacity

You only have so much time, energy, or emotional bandwidth. There may be times when a problem goes beyond your capacity and they need to reach out to someone else for additional support.



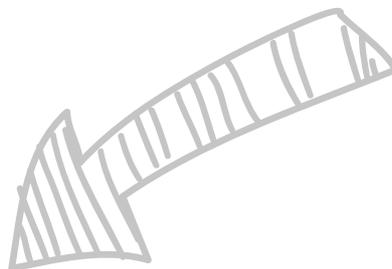
Your Mental Health

You can always set a boundary around anything that will help protect your own mental health.



Activities:

- 1: Stick Figure
- 2: Warning Signs
- 3: Cross the Line
- 4: Traffic Lights
- 5: Skills for Being There
- 6: Role-Play Scenarios
- 7: Advice Column
- 8: Conversation Starters
- 9: Boundaries
- 10: How to Get Support
- 11: Self-Care



Activity 1: Stick Figure



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

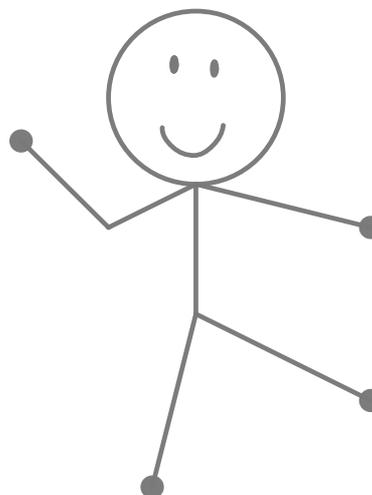
This activity will help students connect behaviour to emotions and begin to recognize that how we act can be based on an underlying feeling we are experiencing.

Student Instructions:

The main goal of this activity is for students to understand the connection between behaviour and emotions. For example, have students think about when they were hungry, or very tired.

- How did this affect emotions? Ability to concentrate? Did they ever say something they didn't actually mean?

Students will draw an example of someone who is having a bad day, with as many details as possible to show the various ways our emotions can show up in our bodies and our actions.



Activity 2: Warning Signs



Time Requirement
30 minutes



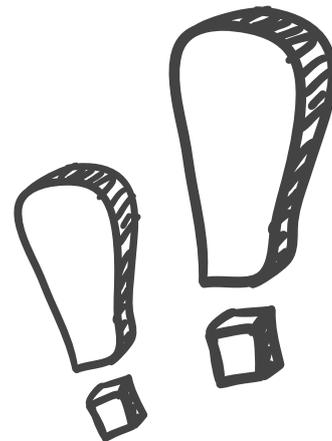
Materials Required
Chart paper, markers

Activity Information

This activity is similar to the mental illness signs activity in the Mental Health Awareness section (page 49). If students have completed this activity and have a coherent understanding, feel free to skip this. Students must understand how to identify if a friend is struggling, so review these concepts as needed.

Student Instructions:

- Have 3 different pieces of chart paper
- Labeled thinking, feelings, and behaviour
- Walk around and add your answers to what you think will be a sign a friend is dealing with something that affects their mental health
- Review answers as a group and discuss



Activity 3: Cross The Line



Time Requirement
45 minutes



Materials Required
Open space

Activity Information

The better students know and have relationships with each other, the more likely they will be able to identify and support a friend in need.

This activity can be used as an icebreaker and cover lighthearted topics or can be used to address more serious topics and help students understand that there are common experiences amongst the group, while also creating respect and empathy for those who have experienced different things.

Some responses help you assess whether students understand key concepts related to the Skills for Being There, and as a result, can shape or inform the delivery of future lessons. Mix these into your delivery as needed.

This activity should only be attempted if you feel that there is trust and safety in your classroom. Engage in conversation with students before the activity to ensure the activity will remain respectful throughout.

Student Instructions:

- Create a line on the floor, or use an area (e.g. a gym) that already has a distinct marking. Have all participants stand on one side of the line
- Explain that you will read a statement that begins with “cross the line if…” and if it applies to them, they should step to the other side of the line
- Can encourage students to take a big step if they strongly agree, and take a small step if they only slightly agree

Activity 3: Cross The Line (cont.)

- After stepping across the line and taking a brief look at what their classmates are doing, they reset for the next question
- It is often encouraged that students are silent throughout the activity to remain respectful

It is important to customize this list and only use statements appropriate to your school or community.

Examples: Statements start as "Cross the line if you..."

Icebreaker-type statements:

- Are you a morning person
- Like playing basketball
- Can play an instrument
- Speak more than one language
- Have a pet

Topic Specific Statements

- Enjoy coming to school
- Have you ever felt overwhelmed at school?
- Feel you have at least one person in your life you can talk to
- Have talked to someone about feeling stressed
- Have ever felt like a friend needed help but you didn't know where to start
- Feel nervous sometimes
- Didn't want to go to school one day because you were feeling stressed
- Have had your feelings hurt by a friend
- Feel like it's tough to show your emotions
- Talk about how you are feeling with a friend
- Have done something you are proud of
- You know someone who has struggled with their mental health

Activity 3: Cross The Line (cont.)

Skills for Being There Learning Related Statements:

- Think you could notice if a friend was struggling
- Believe that anything a friend tells you is confidential
- Believe your friends can count on you or that you can count on your friends
- Would ask for help from an adult if a friend was going through something
- Think there are situations in which it is important to tell a friend's secret
- Have ever had to set a boundary with a friend (e.g. tell them to stop doing something you didn't like)
- Think your friends can do what they want, even if you don't agree

Debrief:

- Ask students to share:
 - o How did it feel to cross the line?
 - o How did it feel to not cross the line?
 - o What did you learn from this activity?

Reminder:

Participants are not commenting on if students did or did not cross the line for certain questions, but instead on the general feelings of the activity



Activity 4: Traffic Lights



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
None

Activity Information

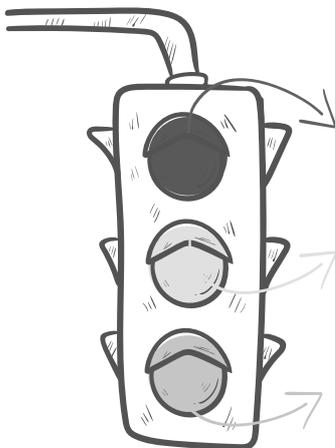
This activity helps students understand situations they feel comfortable helping a friend with and understand when they need support from others to deal with the situation.

Follow up with ensuring students know where they can go for help.

Student Instructions:

- Have students brainstorm a situation in which a friend might come to them for help or support. This could be something they have dealt with or a hypothetical situation
- Brainstorm as many as possible

Review the traffic lights and what they mean:



Red Light: Stop and get help.

Yellow Light: Slow down and consider whether you need more support with this.

Green Light: Go! Go ahead and help out.

Remind students that it's never too early to ask for support. When in doubt, students can always check-in and ask for additional support.

Activity 4: Traffic Lights (cont.)

Students can either vote on the situation or use movement to demonstrate what traffic light colour they think it should be.

- For example, walk if they think it's green, tiptoe if it is yellow, and stop if it's red
- If the situation is identified as yellow or red, discuss why and what they would do to get support if needed

Discussion:

- Remind students that the lights can change at any time. Always be aware that a situation that was once a green light, might become yellow or red
- It's also important to recognize that some students may feel differently about what is a yellow or green light (e.g. I have dealt with this situation so I know how to help, versus, I have never dealt with this situation before so I might ask my mom what to do)
- But students must have a clear understanding of what is a red light situation

Red Light Situations:

- You feel threatened or are threatened (e.g. you have been told to stay out of the situation or else something bad is going to happen to you)
- The person you're helping feels threatened or unsafe (e.g. someone says they will hurt them)
- Family or friends are in danger
- Situations regarding abuse whether it is physical, emotional, sexual, or verbal (e.g. a family member is hitting them)
- Drugs and/or alcohol addiction
- Situations you feel uncomfortable dealing with (e.g. if talking about an eating disorder brings up uncomfortable habits or emotions for you)
- Situations you are not the expert in (e.g. they need support with symptoms of a mental illness)

Activity 5: Skills for Being There



Time Requirement
45 - 60 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet

Activity Information

The purpose of this activity is to introduce and reinforce the steps of how to help a friend. Students will build a better understanding of the steps as they will be the ones teaching the concepts back to the class. These steps will then be practiced in Activity 6: Role-Play Scenarios.

Skills for Being There:

1. Check-In
2. Listen Up
3. Gather Ideas and Weigh the Options
4. Accept Their Choices
5. Show Support

Student Instructions:

- Divide students into groups. Each group will get one of the 5 skills
- Their goal is to understand the skill and to share the information back to the class in a fun and engaging way
- Allow students to get creative in the ways they present this information to the class. Examples could include:
 - o What to do versus what not to do
 - o Creating a skit, commercial, song, or presentation
 - o Game show in which other students have to answer questions about the skills
- Review the skill after each group to clarify understanding and allow students to ask questions

Activity 6: Role-Play Scenarios



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, scissors

Activity Information

Students must understand the "Skills for Being There" steps before engaging in this activity. It may be helpful to have the steps printed out or displayed for groups to reference.

Student Instructions:

- Students should work as partners
- One person gets the scenario and the other has to ask questions to find out what is going on
- They should then follow the Skills for Being There steps to support their friend. Students should take turns being the person who helps

Debrief:

- What went well?
- What was challenging?
- How did you identify something was wrong? Then how did you help?



Activity 7: Advice Column



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Optional student worksheet

Activity Information

This activity is a written alternative to practicing the "Skills for Being There" steps. Students provide a written explanation of how to help a friend.

Students may be unfamiliar with the traditional advice column format. Talk about other formats they may have seen on YouTube, TikTok, etc., and what is different or similar between these formats and a written advice column.

Student Instructions:

Students can practice the Skills for Being There in a written format through this advice column activity.

- Students receive a situation in which someone needs help and they can respond with advice to assist this person
- For this activity, the role-play scenarios from Activity 6 can be used or students can brainstorm new scenarios to use. Have the students write from the perspective of needing help with something and switch with a student to be the advice giver
- Encourage them to think about the steps of helping in creating a detailed response

Note:

There is a practice scenario on the student worksheet. This can be used as a class example to demonstrate what to do or for all students to practice on before making their own scenario up.

Activity 8: Conversation Starters



Time Requirement
30 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, markers

Activity Information

This activity gives students additional resources on how to check-in on a friend and start a conversation if they think something is going on.

Student Instructions:

- Working in partners or small groups, brainstorm how you can start a conversation with someone
- You want to ask open-ended questions that allow the other person to guide the conversation where they want it to go
- Using the example conversation bubbles, participants should write one idea per bubble, but can create additional examples if they have many ideas

Examples could include:

- "How are you... no really how are you?"
- "I noticed _____. Do you want to talk about it?"

Create speech bubble conversation starters to display around the classroom. Practice using a few of these conversation starters within your groups.



Activity 9: Boundaries



Time Requirement
30 - 45 minutes



Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

Boundaries are the limits or rules we set between ourselves and other people. We are always allowed to set limits to keep ourselves healthy and safe.

Tips for Setting Boundaries:

- Be upfront, communicate your limits, and discuss boundaries early
- When possible, provide a reason for why you're setting a boundary and suggest an alternative resource or alternative time
- Don't assume people know what you are thinking or feeling. People may not know your boundaries unless explicitly said

Student Instructions:

Warm Up Activity:

This activity can help students understand boundaries by examining some common boundaries people have.

Name a common statement people have a boundary around. If students have a boundary around this topic, they should raise their hand or stand up. If they don't have a boundary set here, they will stay still.

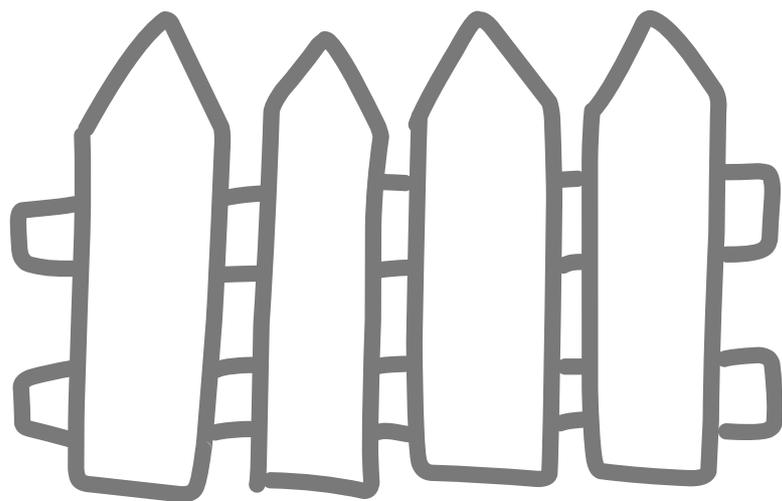
Students may say "it depends". Have them share what and why it depends on something and explore what it means to have flexible boundaries (e.g. boundaries that adapt to different situations). It is also important to know that we can always place a boundary if one didn't exist previously.

Activity 9: Boundaries (cont.)

Boundary Examples:

- Giving someone a hug (or other personal space situations)
- Sharing food or drinks
- Being called a nickname or name other than what you are normally called.
- Sharing your stuff with other people (e.g. clothes, phone, etc.)
- Playing a game you don't like because someone else wants to play it

Allow students to utilize the student worksheet to practice setting boundaries.



Activity 10: How to Get Support



Time Requirement
45 minutes



Materials Required
May need computer access,
posters, and markers

Activity Information

Students will create resources to be displayed in the classroom that peers can reference at any point if they need additional support.

Student Instructions:

- Give groups different organizations or people they can reach out to for help. They then have to go find out as much as they can about that organization and report back to the class
- Groups can create posters for students to be able to reference or present to the class
- Can also use some school or community-specific ones (e.g. school administration team, after-school program, etc.)
- Give students a list of things to research:
 - o Things to find out may include: who to contact and what support they provide, hours, etc.

Examples of organizations include:

- [CMHA Calgary](#)
- [Kids Help Phone](#)
- [ConnectTeen](#)
- [Distress Centre Calgary](#)



Activity 11: Self-Care



Time Requirement
30 minutes



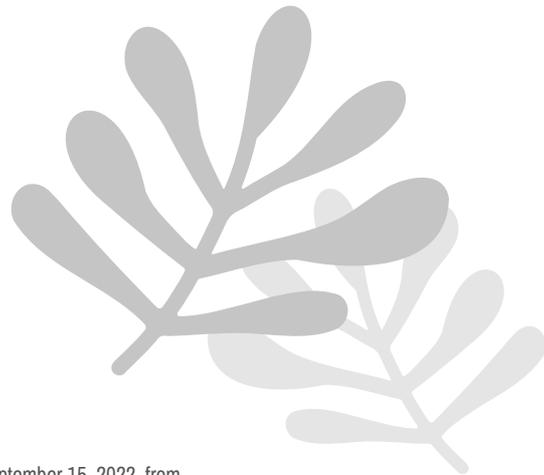
Materials Required
Student worksheet, pencils

Activity Information

Self-care is any action that helps take care of yourself and helps to prioritize your mental health. Self-care is important because it helps to recharge our batteries and build our physical and emotional energy.¹²

Self-care can be different depending on the person and the situation, but some ways people practice self-care include:

- Taking a walk
- Getting enough sleep
- Spending time with a friend
- Getting outdoors
- Mindfulness
- Watching your favourite show
- Expressing emotions through journaling or art
- Expressing gratitude



¹² Jack. (2020). Understanding the Importance of Self-Care. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from <https://jack.org/getattachment/6408ff67-f4e4-47d3-a6a0-90e5c060d33a/Be-There-Poster-1.aspx>

Activity 11: Self-Care (cont.)

Student Instructions:

- Have students brainstorm examples of self-care as a group
- Have this list available somewhere they can see while filling out the student worksheet
- Students must understand how to take care of themselves. To support the people around you, you need to make sure that you first take care of yourself
- This worksheet can be a resource or a 'cheat sheet' for students to draw on when they are feeling strong emotions and are unsure how to cope

Optional Project-Based Learning

Included here are optional activities that take the learnings beyond a short classroom-based activity and involve a greater focus and time dedicated. Some of these projects may require some additional considerations including materials, timing, and school/organizational approval.

Posters or Presentations:

Pick a specific topic such as how to support a friend, coping strategies, self-care, etc. Give a brief outline of what posters should include (e.g. images, words, colour, etc.) Display around various locations of the school or building to help increase awareness about mental health among all students.

Ensure students know the topic knowledge well before they create the posters — complete the activities in this section, and do some group brainstorming about important knowledge to convey.

Empathy Walk:

There are a variety of ways in which an empathy walk can be done. Included here is one format.



Use a copy of a school or building map (often part of fire evacuation plans) and number the places you may visit. This may include a classroom, the hallway outside of the classroom, the gym, the learning commons, the office, etc.

Travel around the areas together. Spend about 3 minutes in the space. While in the space, students should record what they feel in this space and why. Are these spaces welcoming, engaging, and supportive for all?

Encourage students to think about how others may feel in this space. Add any additional thoughts or curiosities about the space.

Debrief and record class data.

- What did you notice?
- Why did people feel either positive or negative in the spaces?
- Were there things that needed to be altered in these spaces?
- Some things may not be able to change. If we cannot change these things, how can we change our reaction/perception?

Scavenger Hunt:

A scavenger hunt can involve important spaces or people that can support students in their mental health or stress management.

What is included in these scavenger hunts is very specific to your school or environment, but some things to consider include:

- Resource Centre
- Counsellor
- Spaces they can go to when upset or in need of support
- Areas where stress or mental health resources may be displayed

To enhance the experience, develop questions students have to either ask the person or find out at the space, or activities that must be completed at each step.

Power of Kindness Campaign:

Encourage students to create a culture of kindness by spreading random acts of kindness throughout the school or building. Classes could engage in big acts of kindness together or individual students could try and see how many kindness activities they can complete.

Bonus:

Similar idea to Secret Santa, but instead students have a secret kindness buddy who tries to spread positivity and nice gestures. Since you don't want to be discovered right away, you should demonstrate kindness to others as well!

Kindness
MATTERS



Classroom Challenge:



Fundraising Challenge

Raise funds for [CMHA Calgary](#) or another mental health charity of the students' choice.



Wellness Challenge

Have classes decide on specific self-care or peer support tasks and track how each class is doing at promoting wellness. For example, classes could compete to see who can practice more mindfulness minutes.

Mental Health Week:

The purpose of a [Mental Health Week](#) (celebrate annually the first week of May) is to have an in-depth focus on mental health through a new topic or focus each day of the week. A Mental Health Week can be a great project to involve multiple classes or the entire school/organization. Some of the lessons within this resource can be utilized throughout the week, but additional considerations for a Mental Health Week might include:

- Highlighting community-specific resources or guest speakers from organizations students interact with
- Multiple aspects of wellness – a Mental Health Week can include activities such as yoga, mindfulness meditation, etc.

School and organization-wide activities may include:



Gratitude Chain

Add a link to a paper chain every time someone is grateful for something that has happened. If all classes are participating, chains can connect from class-to-class.



Wellness Wall

Classes track and compete over who can incorporate as many wellness activities into their daily routine (e.g. mindfulness minutes, physical activity breaks, breathing exercises, etc.)



Youth-Led Conference

Students choose a list of guest speakers that can come to the school to talk about mental health or schedule a mental health fair.



Daily Mental Health Tips during Announcements

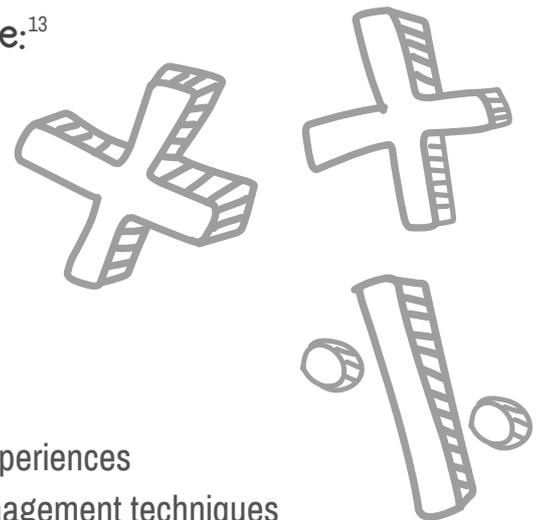
Facts about mental health as well as small pieces of information all students could use to improve their mental health.

Classroom Culture

The following activities help to create a classroom culture that supports the mental well-being of all students. This can arguably be one of the most important activities to support your students in the long run. Ensuring students feel safe, valued, and supported in the classroom will go a long way in creating positive mental health experiences.

Tips to create a positive classroom culture:¹³

- Establish a respectful classroom
- Take a community approach
 - o Everyone is made to feel welcome
 - o Student input is frequently sought and utilized
- Model your own stress or mental health experiences
 - o Notice and name stress in yourself or the classroom
 - o This helps students develop awareness and language
 - o It also helps students feel less isolated in their own experiences
- Provide opportunities for students to practice stress management techniques



Activities:

- Icebreaker and teambuilding activities
- Creating a mental wellness area or calming corner
- Weekly classroom meetings to touch base with how everyone is doing and allow for positives that have happened
- Suggestion box or Google Forms in which students can provide feedback, or identify if there is anyone that needs more support

¹³ Teach Mental Health. Creating a Mentally Healthy Classroom. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b2bb5c35417fcca408531f8/t/5b350ab5352f535b32829f37/1530202808741/Module+7+%28activity+7.10%29+-+PowerPoint+-+Creating+a+Mentally+Healthy+Classroom%5B1%5D.pdf>



Parents/Guardians Information Letter Template

Please feel free to use or adapt the letter template provided, to share with parents and guardians that your classroom or community group will be delivering the KidSMART lessons soon.

Dear Parents and Guardians:

It is our pleasure to announce that we will be delivering learning opportunities from the Canadian Mental Health Association - Calgary Region's (CMHA Calgary) KidSMART Mental Health Toolkit, starting soon.

It is CMHA Calgary's mission to be a leader in reducing the impact of mental illness and addiction in our community. For more than 65 years, CMHA Calgary has provided an integrated service model, focused on early intervention, prevention, education, and support for individuals and families.

KidSMART is a youth-focused mental health education toolkit targeting students in Grades 4 - 6 (ages 8 - 12). KidSMART was launched in 2023, as an extension to CMHA Calgary's popular, facilitated YouthSMART workshops, and serves as a critical component of their continuum of youth-focused, mental health awareness programming. The KidSMART toolkit incorporates curriculum, lesson plans, and activities for teachers and community leaders to deliver education surrounding the key themes of "Stress Management and Healthy Coping", "Mental Health Awareness", and "Skills for Being There" directly to their own youth populations.

Each section of the toolkit begins with a brief overview of fundamental concepts and is followed by engaging and educational activities. Lessons are of various lengths but many can be completed in a 30 - 45-minute timeframe.

Mental health education is extremely important for all ages, and these lessons provide a variety of methods to introduce, practice, and develop a solid understanding of how to deal with stress, build strong mental health habits, and support the well-being of peers.

If you would like to explore the KidSMART lesson plans for yourself, increase your own knowledge about childhood and youth mental health topics, or find mental health supports in your community, please visit youthsmart.ca for important supplementary materials.



Stay Connected with CMHA Calgary



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Canadian Mental Health Association - Calgary Region

Sign-up for our e-newsletter:
<https://secure.cmha.calgary.ab.ca/join-our-newsletter>



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