



Topic



Skills for Being There



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# 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:

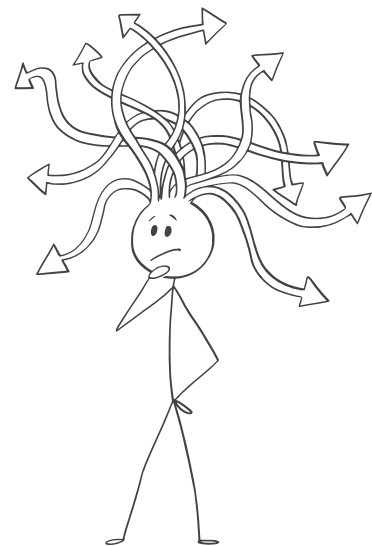
Students will often go to their peers first when experiencing a challenge before they reach out for more formal support (e.g. a parent, teacher, or medical professional). It is important that students not only understand how mental health challenges can affect them but also how to support a friend when 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- Feeling sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks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?

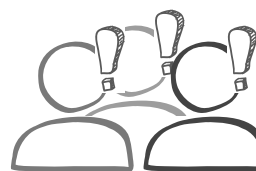
Sometimes problems are bigger than students will be able to handle on their own. Ensure they know to get additional support when one of the following situations happens:



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.

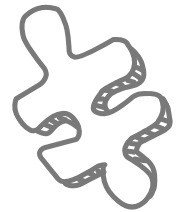
### #2 Listen Up



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.

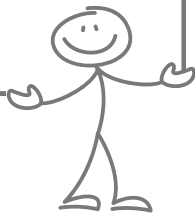


## Limits and Boundaries

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

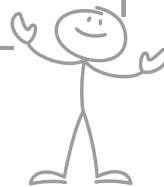
### Your Role

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.



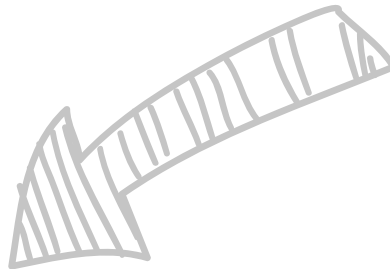
### Your Mental Health

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

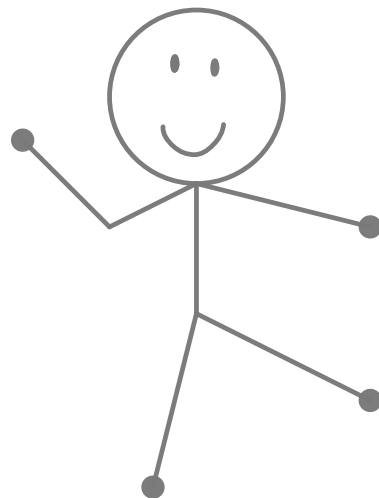
This activity will help students connect behaviour to emotions and begin to recognize that how we act can be based on an underlying feeling we are experiencing.

## 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



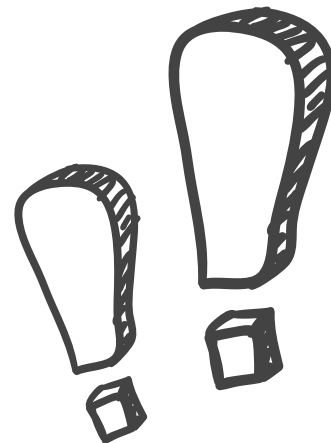
**Materials Required**  
Chart paper, markers

### 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

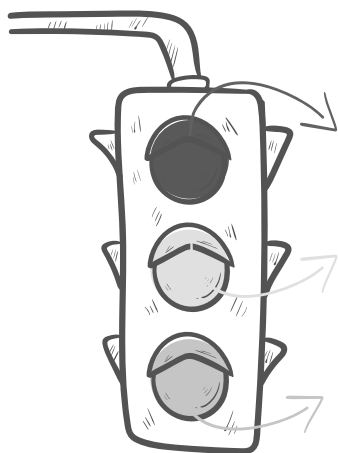
This activity helps students understand situations they feel comfortable helping a friend with and understand when they need support from others to deal with the situation.

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.

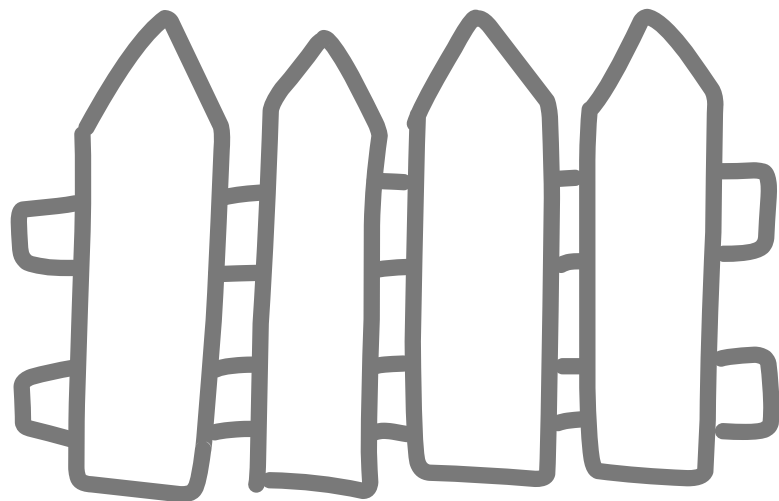
Students may say "it depends". Have them share what and why it depends on something and explore what it means to have flexible boundaries (e.g. boundaries that adapt to different situations). It is also important to know that we can always place a boundary if one didn't exist previously.

## 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 II: 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.

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



## 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



# kidSMART

Mental Health and Resiliency Worksheets  
for Grades 4 - 6 Students

Skills For Being There



Canadian Mental  
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# Activity 1: Stick Figure

Think of a bad day. What are some examples of problems or situations that make a bad day?

How might someone look if they are having a bad day? What might they say or think? Draw a stick figure that shows what they might look like. Add thought bubbles around the figure to show what they may think or say.

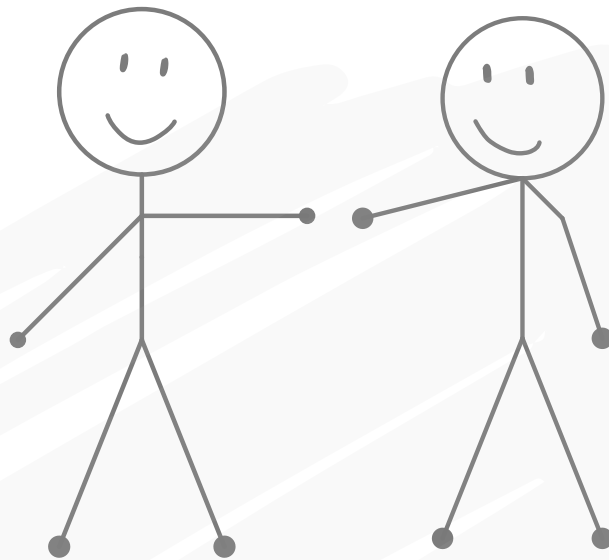
Draw!

Exaggerate! Add as many details as possible! This is less about artistic ability and more about demonstrating as many things as you can.



## Activity 1: Stick Figure (cont.)

If you saw some of these details in a friend, and they hadn't told you how they were feeling, what would you think?



# Activity 5: Skills for Being There

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

## Check-In

It is important to check-in with a friend if we think something is wrong. We cannot help a friend unless we know what is going on.

- Stick to the facts
- Don't judge or make assumptions
- Let them know what changes you've noticed and ask if they are okay. It's as simple as that
- Statements may include "I see..., I noticed..., I heard... you look..., you sound..."
- Example: "I noticed you have seemed down the past few days. Is there anything you'd like to talk about?"
- If they don't want to talk, let them know you are there if they need you



# Activity 5: Skills for Being There (cont.)

## Listen Up

If your friend is willing to talk about what is going on, the most important thing you can do is listen.

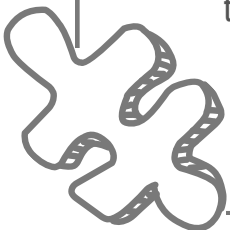
- Good listening skills include posture/body language that shows you are listening and not distracted, not interrupting, but asking questions as needed, and suspending your judgement
- You may ask questions, but it is more important to listen to what they want to share. Questions may include:
  - What happened?
  - How are you feeling?
  - What do you think is bothering you?
  - Are you worried about something?
- Sometimes listening is all you need to do. Not everyone will be ready to problem solve. Maybe they just want to be heard instead



## Gather Ideas

If they are ready to problem solve, you can help them generate ideas and decide what will be the best option.

- Try to help them generate ideas. It is always best that they come up with solutions they feel work for them
- Ask them how they want to solve the issue. Supporting means listening to how they would like to solve the issue, not telling them what to do
- Once your friend has a few ideas of how they can solve their problem, help them evaluate which situation is the best for everyone involved



# Activity 5: Skills for Being There (cont.)

## Accept

- We want to help our friends make positive choices
- Everyone has autonomy, or the ability to make their own decisions  
We cannot force them to make a certain decision
- If a friend makes a dangerous choice – this is when you can intervene and get help

## Show Support

Show you were sincere in your concern.

- The final step is just to be there
- Connect them with help if they need it or just support self-care (for them and yourself!)



## Summary:

- Every situation is unique and every person is unique
- You don't have to be perfect, it's just important to be there for friends and to try your best

## Activity 6: Role-Play Scenarios

Use these scenario cards for students to practice helping a friend.

You had a big fight with  
your sibling

Your pet dog died

A family member is ill

You posted something online  
that people didn't like

You are feeling nervous  
about an upcoming  
sports tryout

You found out you are  
moving and you are very  
worried about going to  
a new school

You are feeling bad about  
yourself after comparing  
yourself to other people's  
posts online

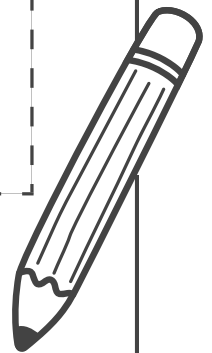
You are feeling off today -  
tired, grumpy, and have a  
headache

Your best friend is hanging  
out with someone else and  
you don't hear from her  
very much anymore

You got a bad mark on a  
test and are scared your  
parents will be upset

## Activity 6: Role-Play Scenarios (cont.)

Add any scenarios you think are relevant to your students/school community.

## Activity 7: Advice Column

Example:

Dear Ask Me Anything,

*I have had a lot of trouble sleeping lately. I just lay in bed and my mind is running over everything that happened during the day. It is getting to the point where I can barely function the next day because I am so tired. I have been skipping track practice as a result. I don't know what to do.*

Sincerely,  
Always Tired



How would you write a response to this question?

## Activity 7: Advice Column (cont.)

Reflect:

- What is the issue? What is the evidence that there is a problem?
- What are options to solve the problem?
- What are the pros and cons of these options?
- Is this something that additional support such as a trusted adult is required?



# Activity 8: Conversation Starters

Create speech bubble conversation starters to display around the classroom.



## Activity 9: Boundaries

What are some of your boundaries? How would you set a boundary if someone was doing something you didn't like?

Practice setting boundaries around helping a friend with these examples:

Your friend comes up to you for help, but you're in the middle of studying for your test tomorrow.

"I'd really like to help, but I am too distracted worrying about my test. Could we talk at lunch?"

You just sent out a text to your friends that you are shutting off your phone and electronics for the night to get some space and a good night's sleep. Right after you send this, your friend starts to text you that she needs your help.

A classmate has confided in you that they are upset because they feel like they have no friends. They ask you to spend time with them every day after school, but you feel you need a break today.

## Activity 9: Boundaries (cont.)

You have told your friend several times that you are unable to help them with their problem. You have guided them through alternative ways to deal with the situation, but they just don't seem to act.

Write your own situation (S) and practice (P).

S

P

S

P

## Activity 11: Self-Care

It is important to know how to take care of yourself when times are challenging or stressful. To support the people around you, you need to make sure that you first take care of yourself.

Self-care builds up our reserves and recharges our battery. It maintains and replenishes our energy in the long-term.

- What do you currently do to take care of yourself?
- How do you know when you need self-care?

Sometimes what we need depends on what is going on in our lives. What self-care could you do based on the emotion you feel? Draw or write what works for you!

Angry (e.g. Go for a walk, listen to music)



Sad (e.g. Practice gratitude, get outside)



## Activity 11: Self-Care (cont.)

Tired (e.g. Go to bed early, disconnect from technology)



Lonely (e.g. Spend time with a pet, make plans with a friend)



Scared (e.g. Talk to someone, deep breathing)



Tense (e.g. Go for a walk, take a warm bath)



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