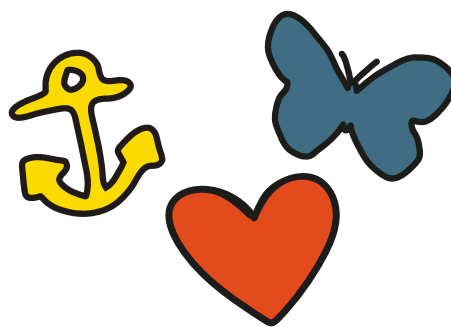


# Supporting Kids in the Classroom



**ON OUR SLEEVES<sup>®</sup>**

The Movement for Children's Mental Health



Dear Educator,

As clinical director for *On Our Sleeves*, the movement for children's mental health, I want to personally thank you for all you do to support children in your community through your work as an educator. We hope these materials around mental health and wellness will support your students.

Without the generosity of our donors, this program and its supporting contents would not exist. Their personal and financial support plays a crucial role in making sure that we can deliver this quality content to teachers and educators across the country at no charge. You can learn more about them at [OnOurSleeves.org](https://OnOurSleeves.org).

In addition, if you are looking for more resources for your classroom, the *On Our Sleeves* website has how-to guides with resources to download. Even better, join our e-community and let us know what you are using in your classroom and what other content would be helpful.

In our effort to continuously improve the free resources we share with parents, caregivers and educators everywhere, we have created a brief questionnaire (five minutes or less) and would appreciate your honest feedback on the materials you've received. You can complete the survey here: [www.SurveyMonkey.com/r/ClassRooms\\_oos](https://www.SurveyMonkey.com/r/ClassRooms_oos).

Again, thank you for all you do for children in your community.

*Parker L. Huston, PhD*

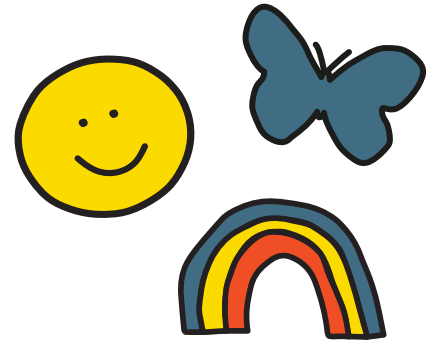
Parker L. Huston, PhD  
Clinical Director, *On Our Sleeves*  
Pediatric Psychologist

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# Educator Tips: Self-Care



*An empty lantern provides no light. Self-care is the fuel that allows your light to shine brightly.*

Self-care is an important aspect of being an effective educator. School providers are an important resource for students, which places an emotional burden on them at times. Behavioral science research tells us that many of our emotional resources have a limited capacity and function somewhat like a battery. When depleted, they need to be recharged to work best. As a supportive adult, many educators will share in both successes and challenges with their students and may be exposed to discussions of traumatic experiences of their students. Exposure to another person's trauma can cause secondary/vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and even burnout. To combat these symptoms, we've created the following guide to help you better understand warning signs and ways to increase resiliency.


## **Signs of vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and burnout include:**

- Bottling up emotions
- Exhaustion
- Absenteeism
- Isolation from others
- Excessive blaming
- Sadness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of flexibility
- Not participating in teamwork.

It's important to remember that compassion fatigue is a NORMAL response to an ABNORMAL circumstance. We can prevent and intervene early to lessen the impact by building resilience and specific coping skills.

## Tips to help create and increase resiliency

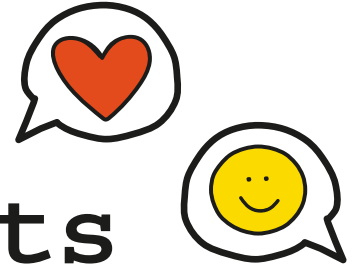
- Take care of your body: Exercise, eat healthy foods, get adequate sleep and drink plenty of water each day.
- Spend time with others whose company you enjoy.
- Seek out comforting and relaxing activities that bring you happiness. Schedule this into your day/week.
- Allow others to do things for you when needed—ask for help!
- Take time away from electronics.
- Create a **gratitude list** of the people, places and things you are thankful for.
- Take 5-10 minutes during the workday to do a mindfulness activity.
- Participate in professional development to re-energize yourself.
- Build in humor, laughter and fun during your day.
- Identify and celebrate the successes for the day, week and month.

Professional	Psychological	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take time for lunch</li> <li>• Set boundaries</li> <li>• Do not work during your time off</li> <li>• Get regular supervision</li> <li>• Learn to say NO</li> <li>• Plan your next career advancement</li> <li>• Take a class</li> <li>• Take vacations and use sick days</li> <li>• Read a book about a topic you love</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness activities</li> <li>• Journal</li> <li>• Aromatherapy</li> <li>• Draw, paint, make art</li> <li>• Attend a community arts event</li> <li>• Relax in the sun</li> <li>• Garden</li> <li>• Read a self-help book</li> <li>• Join a support group</li> <li>• Think about your positive qualities</li> <li>• Practice gratitude exercises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe housing</li> <li>• Regular medical care</li> <li>• Eat healthy</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Get enough sleep</li> <li>• Take vacations/ staycations</li> <li>• Get a massage</li> <li>• Try acupuncture</li> <li>• Bubble baths</li> <li>• Take a walk</li> </ul> 

Source: OlgaPhoenix.com

View more resources for educators at [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org).

# Wellness Tips for Your Students



Add wellness tips for your students to help them manage their mental health during the school day. Use any of the following during morning announcements, in your classes, in parent newsletters and more. You can also encourage students to share ways they are using these tips. They are grouped by topic so you can choose the tips!

## Self-Care

Remember to practice self-care. Self-care is important to your success in school and life. Practice self-care by eating healthy, getting good sleep, moving a little bit every day and creating healthy relationships with family and friends.

## Boundaries

**Tip 1:** Realize you don't have to please everyone. There is no way that you can make everyone happy all the time. You are not chocolate! Concentrate on making yourself happy first and you can cut out lots of stress and hassle from your life.

**Tip 2:** Know your limits and boundaries. Accept the things you can control and the things you cannot. This will help you feel more relaxed and happy long term.

## Meditation / Take a Break

**Tip 1:** Take advantage of meditation or yoga classes on Youtube.com. These skills can help you get a release from stress through a relaxing session of meditation and moving your body.

**Tip 2:** Take a break. Sometimes students overwhelm themselves with everything they have going on. If you're feeling like you've got too much on your plate, cut back on the amount of work and extracurricular activities to make your schedule more manageable.

## Fitting in Making Friends / Accepting Changes

**Tip 1:** Understand that it may take time to fit in. Most people don't make best friends on the first day of school. It takes time to build friendships, so don't get discouraged if you don't fit in right away.

**Tip 2:** Change can be annoying, uncomfortable or simply terrifying. Things will change both at home and in your school life, but can open new and exciting opportunities. Accepting change will help you be flexible and happy over time.

## Friendships

**Tip 1:** Build new friendships, and work on keeping the ones you already have. A big part of school is meeting new people and forming new friendships so get out there and meet new people whenever possible.

**Tip 2:** Authenticity, honesty and trust are qualities we expect to find in a friend. There's an understanding that the binding together of people in friendship helps each of us define and realize a meaningful life. If these appeal to you, work on demonstrating them to people around you.

## Building Confidence / Strength in Numbers

**Tip 1:** Build on your confidence. If you know you're good at certain things build on the confidence you take from these activities rather than concentrating on your faults.

**Tip 2:** Find strength in numbers. You may have an easier time feeling good and fitting in if you find a group of students who share similar interests and values as you.

## Goal Setting

**Tip 1:** Set realistic goals. Decide what you want to achieve academically, socially or personally, and write down the steps you need to reach your goal. Aim high but keep it simple so it is achievable for you. Remember to celebrate the small accomplishments along the way to reaching your goal.

**Tip 2:** Break up your routine and do something fun or different one day. Although our routines are comfortable, a little change of pace can perk up your day. Plan a trip with friends, take a walk in a different park or hang some new pictures in your room.

## Rewarding Self & Accomplishments

When you play your favorite video game there's always a huge fanfare when you make a big accomplishment – music, flashy lights, and a "great job!" message from the computer.

When you sink a three pointer, score a touchdown, or you spike on the other team, there's the cheer of the crowd roaring behind you.

But when you've gotten through the day without having a meltdown, you've just fixed a snack for your sibling, or finally finished that math problem that's been bothering you...none of that happens.

Our brains love to be rewarded. The chemicals associated with this make us feel good — completely naturally. But in some cases, we have to take care of ourselves and not depend on other people.

Take some time today and write down three things you accomplished. You can use a piece of paper, a journal, or a phone app. Make a habit of this and you'll find that your brain loves the reward!

## Social Supports

**Tip 1:** Surround yourself with good people. People with strong family or social connections are generally healthier. Make plans with supportive family members and friends, or find activities where you can meet new people, such as a school club, team or community support group.

**Tip 2:** Give your time. Volunteer your time and energy to help someone else. You'll feel good about doing something tangible to help someone in need — and it's a great way to meet new people.

## Mindfulness

What is mindfulness? It is paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally.

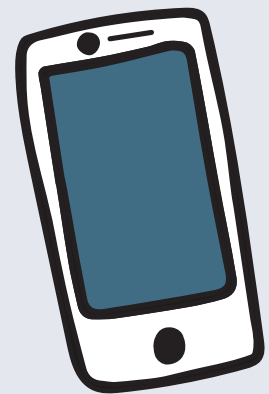
Mindfulness can help you with relaxing, reducing stress, helping your memory and keeping you from being distracted or disengaged. All things that can be helpful in school, personal life, and with relationships.

### Cellphone Mindfulness Activity

Use your cellphone or a different object that you can hold in your hand if you do not have a cellphone or don't have access to your phone to participate in this mindfulness activity.

To begin hold the object in one of your hands, close your eyes, and breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. With your eyes still closed trace the object with your finger, notice any bumps or grooves, any buttons or scratches. Keep breathing in through your nose, and out through your mouth.

What was it like to focus on just your breath and your phone? If it was relaxing, you might enjoy practicing mindfulness.



## Mindful Eating

**Tip 1:** Slowing down is one of the best ways we can get our mind and body to communicate what we really need from food. The body actually sends a signal after about 20 minutes of eating to the brain saying you are full. If we slow down, we can give our bodies a chance to catch up to our brains, and help with not eating more than we need.

**Tip 2:** Practice mindful eating. Use your five senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell to observe your food before you eat. This can also help you to slow down, and allow your body to better process the food.



## Routines & Asking for Help

**Tip 1:** Create a routine. If you get yourself in the habit of scheduling time for homework and studying, you'll realize you'll still have time to hang out with friends, play video games and sleep. By doing this, you will find the balance between schoolwork and doing the things you enjoy.

**Tip 2:** Ask for help. When you're feeling overwhelmed, reach out and ask for help from teachers, family members and friends. For example, asking a teacher for help may allow you to complete more difficult assignments or projects. Or talking with family or friends to get advice on situations you are dealing with.

## Break from Studying / Realistic Goal Setting

**Tip 1:** Give yourself a break. If you've been studying steadily for hours, give your eyes and mind a chance for a rest by taking a break. You can come back feeling more refreshed and ready to go.

**Tip 2:** Be realistic. Sometimes there's just no way you can get done everything you'd like to in one day. Be realistic about your goals and set a timeline to accomplish tasks. For example, to limit stress, when you have a big project or paper due, break it up into sections so that you can complete it on time or early.

## Tips to Reduce Stress

Make it a point to be active and get your body moving. Setting a tangible goal, like 30 minutes of activity, is a great way to start! You can find activities on your phone by using apps or searching the internet. Just keep moving!

Did you know that students need about 8 to 10 hours of sleep to function best, but according to a study only 15% do? Not getting enough sleep can affect your mood, physical and mental health as well as your academics. Before bed, turn off electronics at least an hour before trying sleep.

Be mindful of the impact that substance use has on your wellness. Drug and alcohol use puts you in serious physical, mental and legal danger. If you need help, team up with someone who can hold you accountable that is a professional and a group of family and friends that will support your sobriety.

Get educated about alcohol and drugs. You cannot rely on the myths and misconceptions that are out there among your friends and on the internet. Your ability to make the right decisions includes getting educated. Do research, and talk with professionals that study and understand substance abuse. As you learn, share what you are learning with your friends and your family.



## Coping Skills

**Tip 1:** Learn how to deal with stress by practicing good coping skills: Try one-minute of deep breathing, do Tai Chi, take a nature walk, play with your pet or try writing in a journal as a stress reducer. Also, remember to smile and see the humor in life. Research shows that laughter can boost your immune system, ease pain, relax your body and reduce stress.

**Tip 2:** Quiet your mind and try mindfulness! Relaxation exercises can improve your state of mind and outlook on life. In fact, research shows that meditation may help you feel calm and enhance the effects of other stress reducers like therapy, etc.

## Belly Breathing

Did you know that as your heart rate approaches 100 beats per minute, your brain starts to go into the “Freeze, Flight, or Fight” mode? This means that unnecessary brain functions — like those that help form words or the ones that help us make informed decisions — all start to go “offline.”

Yep, that means that when you’re feeling your heart race before a big test or when you have to give a speech, the ONE THING you need is the ONE THING your brain is going to have trouble giving you.

Stop. Take a deep breath by pushing your belly out. Hold it for as long as you feel comfortable. Then slowly exhale like you’re blowing out birthday candles.

This will allow your brain to be able to say, “Thank you.”

## Breathing

**Tip 1:** Practice mindfulness by taking a couple of minutes to notice your breathing. Sense the flow of the breath, the rise and fall of your belly. You can focus on your breath like this, any time you may feel overwhelmed.

**Tip 2:** Another way to reduce stress is to not fill up all your time with “doing.” Take some time to simply be.

When your mind wanders to thinking, gently bring it back to your breath. This way you can give your mind a break and be present in the moment — free of worries from the past and the future.

## Gratitude

This week the challenge is to show gratitude. Gratitude is the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness. Research shows that by practicing gratitude, your health, relationships, emotions and school performance can improve.

Write down something you are grateful for.

## Physical Activity and Giving Thanks

**Tip 1:** Participate in physical activity three times per week by going for a walk, playing a sport or simply stretching. Research shows that physical activity can increase energy levels, reduce depression and boost your overall well-being.

**Tip 2:** Track gratitude and achievement with a journal. Include three things you were grateful for and three things you were able to accomplish each day. This will help you see what is going well and keep a positive outlook.

## Test Taking Tips: Sleep / Positive Thoughts

**Tip 1:** Avoid nerves before a test by making sure you get plenty of sleep the night before. Eight to 9 hours are suggested for teens to feel their best.

**Tip 2:** Thinking positive thoughts about your ability to succeed on the test can rapidly improve you scores. So set aside the negative thoughts and change them into positive ones. For example, instead of thinking “I will fail,” change the thought to, “I will do my best.”

## Test Taking Tips: Nutrition

Don't go to the exam with an empty stomach. Fresh fruits and vegetables are often recommended to reduce stress. Avoid stressful foods with high sugar content and processed foods like soda pop, potato chips or candy.

## Test Taking Tips: Planning / Avoid Cramming

**Tip 1:** Avoid test taking nervousness by planning ahead and being prepared. Ask your teacher for a study guide, study with friends and make sure to review material in a timely manner.

**Tip 2:** Avoid cramming right before the test. Break down material into sections or chapters. Try focusing on one section per study session until all needed material is covered. This will prepare you for success without as much stress.

## Test Taking Tips: Focus / Relax

**Tip 1:** Focus on addressing each question individually. As you take the test, if you don't know an answer, don't obsess over it. Instead, answer the best way you can or skip over the question and come back to it after you've answered other questions.

**Tip 2:** Relax. If you're so nervous that you blank out, you might need a mini break. Of course, you can't get up and move around in the middle of a test, but you can wiggle your fingers and toes, take four or five deep breaths, or picture yourself on in a calm place.

## Memory / Sleep

Did you ever watch the movie *Inside Out*? Remember the part where the different memories are processed while the main character Riley sleeps? Did you know that was based on actual studies of why we sleep? During sleep our brains are really active in processing the memories of the day.

Imagine if you just collected every single piece of paper that came your way and stuffed it in your locker. Eventually you wouldn't be able to find anything you need!

Sleep isn't just about rest. It's about organizing key memories, writing important information into long-term memory and dumping all the random stuff you don't need.

So try to make sleep a priority:

- Put down the phone and switch to listening to something calming.
- Don't eat right before bed — or drink caffeine.
- Try to aim for nine (yes, nine!) hours of sleep.

Your brain will thank you.

## Challenge: Acts of Kindness

Random acts of kindness are a selfless act performed by kind people to either help or cheer up a random stranger, for no reason other than to make people happier.

We never know who may be feeling sad, lonely or frustrated. Sometimes just simply doing something small like saying hello or opening a door can make a big difference for others and their well-being.

To participate in this challenge, write down a random act of kindness you have done or plan to do in the future.



## Healthy Relationships / Abuse

Often we think of abuse as physically attacking someone, but did you know that many behaviors that involve asserting power and control over someone can be abusive?

### **Abuse is:**

- Making people afraid.
- Invalidating other's feelings.
- Forcing people to isolate from their friends and family.
- Frequent blaming and shaming.
- Using kids, pets, or peers as leverage for control.
- Not letting someone take part in decision making.
- Limiting someone else's access to control their own money or opportunities.
- Threatening someone.

These are all behaviors that can be red flags for abuse.

A healthy relationship is based on equality and has trust, support and accountability.

# Building Connections in the Classroom

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Did you know much of our early learning begins with personal connections? Positive human connection during early childhood creates boundless benefits for a developing child. Research tells us healthy connections with teachers and caregivers influence a child's growing brain, strengthening their capacity to handle stress, communicate effectively, sustain attention and think about the future.

Why are connections outside of the home so important? According to the U.S. Department of Education, approximately 59% of children under age six spend part or all their day in the care of someone other than their primary caregiver. Childcare providers and teachers are essential to creating personal connection, thus having a profound developmental impact on the children they care for.

## What are some simple ways connection can be created in the classroom?

### Presence

Being present in the moment means you are solely focused on the child. You are there to give them your full attention and to see what the moment brings. Presence is about accepting all the emotions of that time with a child.

**Strategy:** Create curiosity spaces in your classroom. Use objects, such as pots and pans or leaves, which inspire conversations and creativity. Sit with the child and wonder and create with these objects, which can be found in nature or in your home. Try to use items in creative ways to make something new together, using imagination.

### Playfulness

Actively playing lets children know you want to be there with them and that they are important to you.

**Strategy:** Get down on the child's level and engage in play to learn more about their interests. Follow the child's lead in play and conversation. Floor play is effective when used frequently during the day even for just a few minutes at a time.

### Eye Contact

Getting down on the child's level and making eye contact creates connection. Eye contact helps to improve shared experience and empathy between people.

**Strategy:** Play simple early childhood games which encourage eye contact. Create different versions for different ages. Use blankets, pillows and other items to keep it fun and novel. Peek-a-boo and patty cake are simple and fun for many children.

## Touch

Touch is the first sensation we experience with our primary caregiver. Physical touch helps to regulate emotions when it is provided appropriately and safely. For babies, this might include being held or rocked. For toddlers, preschool and elementary-aged children, this might include a hug or a high five.

**Strategy:** For children in daycare, use your environment to create spaces where children can relax and access soft, comforting objects, such as blankets and pillows. Place a rocking chair in the library or calm down area so children can rock to calm themselves. For preschool children, create special rituals, like a hug at the end of the day, a special handshake or a high five between activities. Always respect a child's boundaries if they indicate not wanting to be hugged or held.

**The good news is these elements are often already happening in many classrooms and early learning settings.**

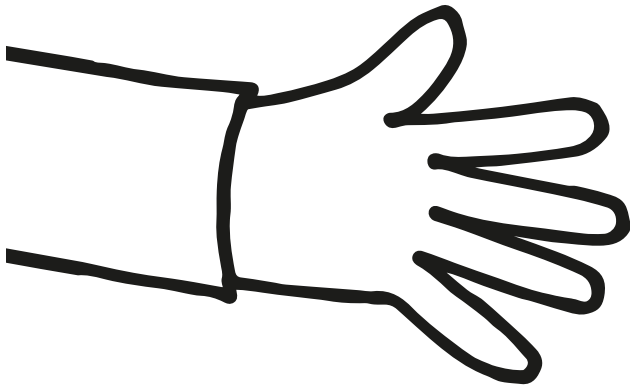
# Activities for Daily Routines

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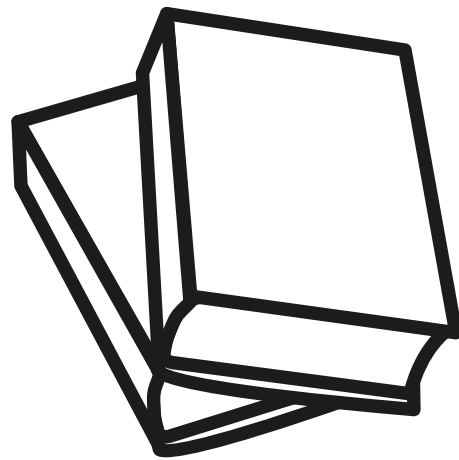
Print out icons for the various activities that are part of the daily routine. Try to have at least one icon for every child in the class so that each child can color one of the icons and practice cutting with scissors.

Laminate and use Velcro to create a daily routine board.

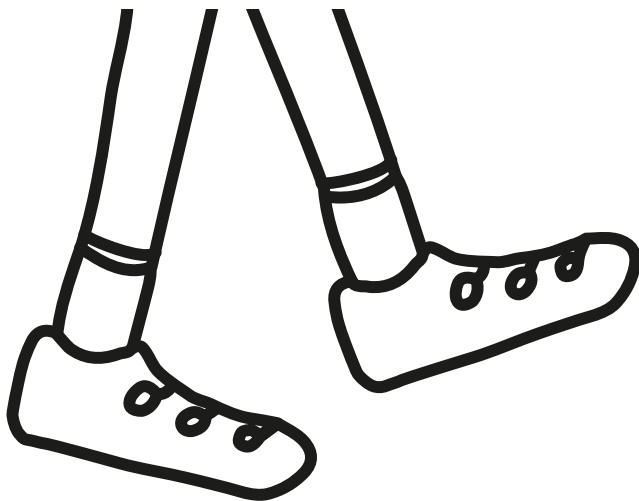
Each morning, have the children place the activities for the day on the board. Throughout the day, have the children remove the icons as they are completed.



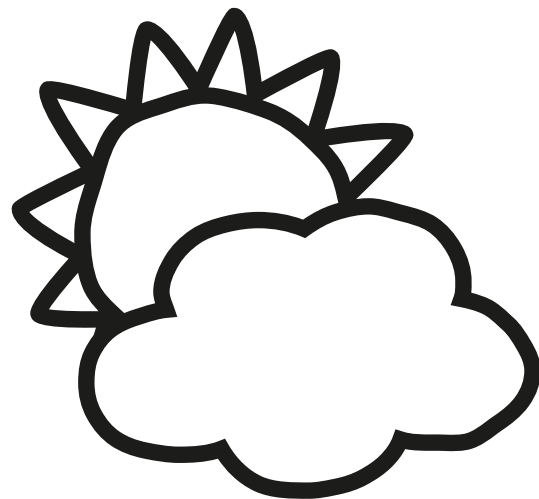
**Hand-washing**



**Reading time**



**Play time**



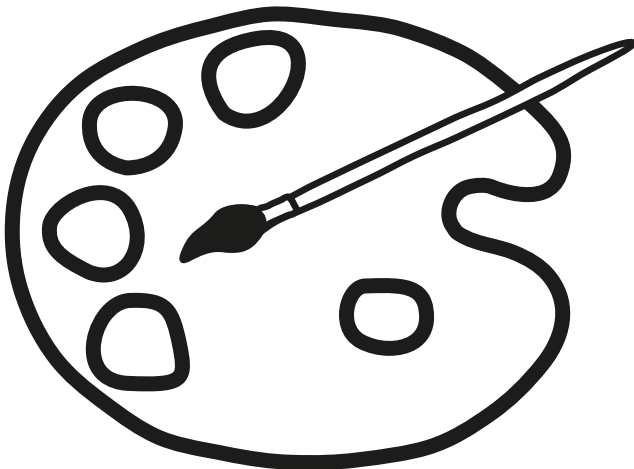
**Nap time / Quiet time**



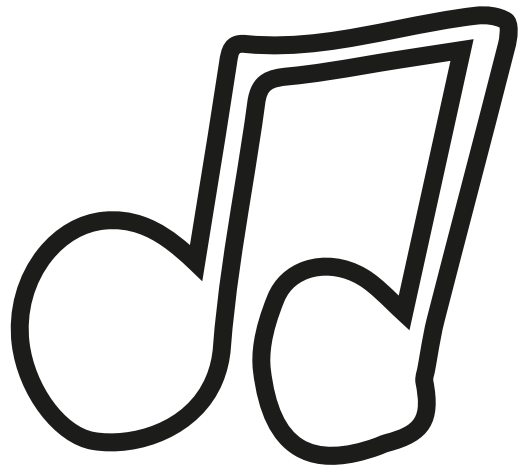
**Snack time**



**Learning time**



**Art**



**Music**



# Kindness Challenge



## Instructions

We know exercising and eating healthy can do a body good. But so can practicing kindness. Studies show that practicing kindness is beneficial for our own mental health and well-being too. It can:

- Help reduce stress.
- Increase your sense of happiness.
- Reduce negative emotions.
- Help you feel more connected to others.
- Reinforce important social skills that support healthy development.

Use these activities to practice kindness in the classroom. Feel free to do all the activities in one week, or do one a week — your choice! Use this scripting below for your students. Ask students to share responses if they feel comfortable.

## Day 1

### Your Challenge: Brighten Someone's Day!

The best way to show kindness to someone else is by letting them know you care about them. Contact someone you care about call them, video chat, send a letter or any other way to let them know you care about them!

Here are some ideas of what you can tell someone:

- Your favorite thing about them.
- Something they have done for you that was nice.
- A skill they have that you admire.

Reaching out to someone you miss will make their day, but it will also make you feel good as well. Does anyone want to share what they will do today?

## Day 2

### Your Challenge: Be Kind to Yourself!

Being kind to ourselves is as important as being kind to others. When we take the time to recharge and practice positive thinking, we are better people!

Today, we are going to list the reasons we are awesome! We are going to write down at least three things we love about ourselves or that we are proud of!

#### (Distribute handout)

Would anyone like to share anything from their awesome list?

### Day 3

#### Your Challenge: Complete at Least One Random Act of Kindness Today

An act of kindness can go a long way in making someone's day. Here's a list of ideas.

1. Hold the door open for someone.
2. Do a chore that you normally don't do.
3. Bring a trash bag on a walk and collect any trash that you come across.
4. Bake treats for animals. Pets at shelters would love to have treats!
5. Leave Post-it notes with positive phrases around school or around your house.
6. Help someone who is being bullied.
7. Give someone a compliment in-person or on social media.
8. Send a letter to a good friend.
9. Create ready-to-go-bags for people in need. You can help by filling a bag with a small bottle of water, a quick snack such as raisins, gloves, toothpaste, a toothbrush and a small packet of dog food (their dogs are hungry too!).
10. Video chat with someone you haven't seen in a while.

Does anyone want to share what they will do?

### Day 4

#### Your Challenge: Smile at Someone Today!

Smile at anyone you know today — or someone you don't. A simple smile can be contagious. It will make you feel better — and go a long way with your friends, classmates and family. Research shows that if you smile at someone and they smile back, there is an increase in your "feel-good" endorphins.

Bonus: Smiling can also lower your heart rate and blood pressure so it makes you feel better!

### Day 5

#### Your Challenge: Choose Your Own!

For the final day of our Kindness Challenge, choose your own act of kindness. Does anyone have any suggestions on what they'll do?



# I am AWESOME!



---

You are amazing and there's no one like you! Being kind to ourselves is as important as being kind to others. When we take the time to recharge and practice positive thinking, we are better people!

Here are the ways I am awesome!

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_





# Growing Our Gratitude

Our lives have drastically changed during the past year. We all have had to adjust to a “new normal” and simultaneously face and cope with the different challenges the era of COVID-19 has presented. During these times, it’s important to continue practicing healthy habits that can boost our mental wellness and promote a positive mental outlook. One thing we can do that doesn’t require a lot of time but has many positive benefits is to show gratitude. While acknowledging our disappointments and grieving what we have lost during this time is also natural and healthy, it is equally important to recognize and appreciate what we have in our life. Research shows that people who think about the good things in their life are healthier – and happier! They feel more energized, sleep better, have stronger social connections, and feel better about themselves – including having fewer physical problems, symptoms and a stronger immune system. Gratitude helps us grow mentally and grow as a person.

## Instructions:

Use the guide below to teach your students about mental health and gratitude. Three worksheets are included to help you talk about gratitude, practice gratitude and send messages of gratitude to classmates, family and friends.

- When your throat hurts or we break a bone, we go to the doctor.
- Our throat and our bones are all part of our physical health. As part of our physical health, we do things to help us stay healthy. One example is eating foods that are good for us. What are other things we do to keep ourselves physically healthy?
- **DISCUSSION: Examples can include exercising, not smoking, brushing and flossing our teeth, going to the doctor, wearing sunscreen, etc.**
- Sometimes we can feel okay but then we get a sore throat or a broken bone that makes us feel not okay.
- That same thing can happen to our thoughts and feelings. Our thoughts and feelings are part of our mental health.
- Sometimes we feel happy and excited. When are times you feel happy or excited?
- **DISCUSSION: Give examples of times when you feel happy and excited to lead the conversation.**

*(Continued)*

- Other times we might feel sad, worried or confused. When are times you might feel this way?
- **DISCUSSION: Give examples of times when you may be sad or worried.**
- It's normal to feel all of these things – happy, excited, sad, worried or confused. But people sometimes can feel sad, worried or confused all the time and may need help with their thoughts and feelings. If our friends are feeling this way, we want to be a good friend to them by supporting them, especially when they are having a hard time.
- One thing we can do to boost each other up and help with our mental health and wellness is grow our gratitude. We can do this by practicing gratitude. Gratitude means talking about what we are thankful for, showing that we appreciate things in our life and showing kindness.
- By practicing gratitude or thankfulness, it makes us healthier and happier. Practicing it helps our brain so we feel less negative emotions.
- We're going to practice gratitude and thankfulness to grow our mental wellness.
- **DISTRIBUTE: "Growing Our Gratitude" Handout**
- We are going to think of things we have to be grateful for. One of those things is yourself! We're going to complete this handout to practice. Write down:
  - What you like about yourself.
  - What you are thankful for right now.
  - A person or two you are thankful for and why.
- **DISCUSSION: Give examples for each question. Make sure to highlight what you like about yourself and others, which will help a child identify characteristics they like about themselves, e.g., I like that I'm an organized person, as opposed to external attributes/items like shoes or clothes. For older kids this normalizes being able to say things we like about ourselves. As we get older, it becomes harder to do this and sometimes even less socially acceptable to do so. Talk about the answers on the worksheet. Praise your child for sharing and talk further about the things they are thankful for.**
- Then we're going to make notes for the people we are grateful for to create a network of support. We can write notes to the people you listed earlier or come up with different people. It can make a big difference to know someone appreciates you!
- **COMPLETE: Gratitude Cards. Encourage students to take home or give to a classmate.**
- Remember, we all can help each other stay mentally healthy by supporting each other and talking to a trusted adult if needed. **DISCUSSION: Give examples of a trusted adult: Such as me, your coach, your teachers, etc.** And we can help ourselves by practicing our gratitude and thankfulness each day.
- **NOTE: Send home to families the two handouts enclosed to help families practice at home.**



# Growing Our Gratitude

**What makes me happy:**

---

---

---

---

**What I'm thankful for right now:**

1. 

---
2. 

---
3. 

---

**I am thankful for these people because:**

---

---

---

---



# 7 Days of Growing Our Gratitude

*Write what you are thankful for each day and share with your family members.*

**Today I am thankful for...**

**Monday:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Tuesday:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Wednesday:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Thursday:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Friday:** \_\_\_\_\_

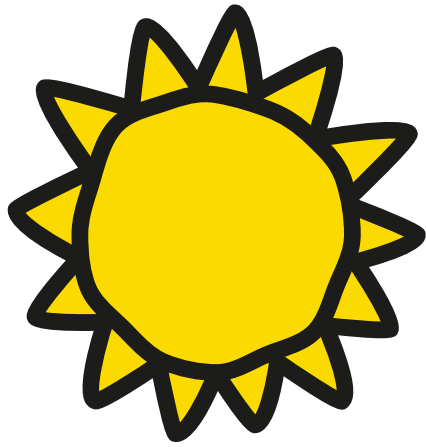
\_\_\_\_\_

**Saturday:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Sunday:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



You light up my life!  
I'm grateful for you!

To: \_\_\_\_\_

From: \_\_\_\_\_

**ON OUR SLEEVES®**

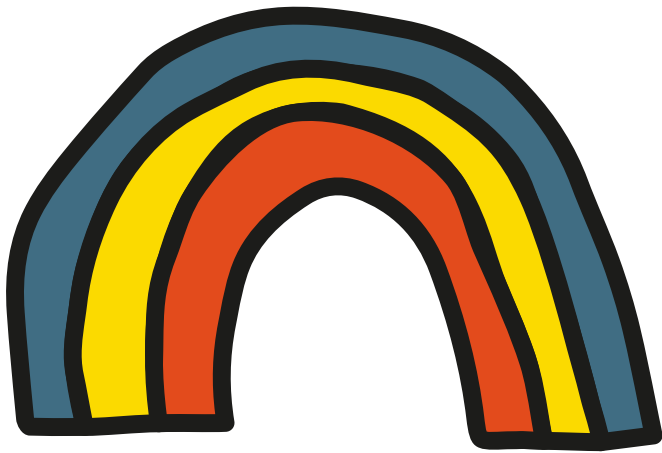


My heart is full because of you!  
I am grateful for you!

To: \_\_\_\_\_

From: \_\_\_\_\_

**ON OUR SLEEVES®**



I'm grateful for you!  
Here's a virtual hug!

To: \_\_\_\_\_

From: \_\_\_\_\_

**ON OUR SLEEVES®**



Just because we can't be together  
doesn't mean I'm not thinking of you!  
I'm grateful for you!

To: \_\_\_\_\_

From: \_\_\_\_\_

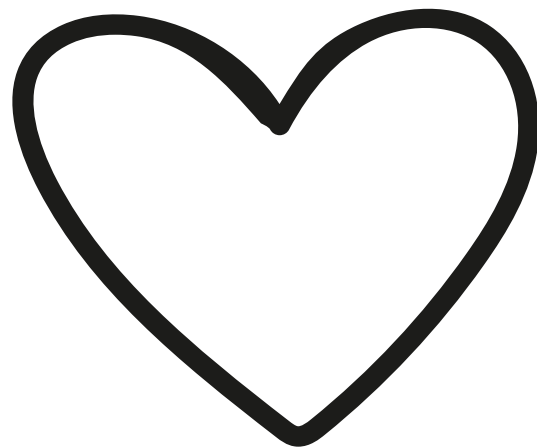
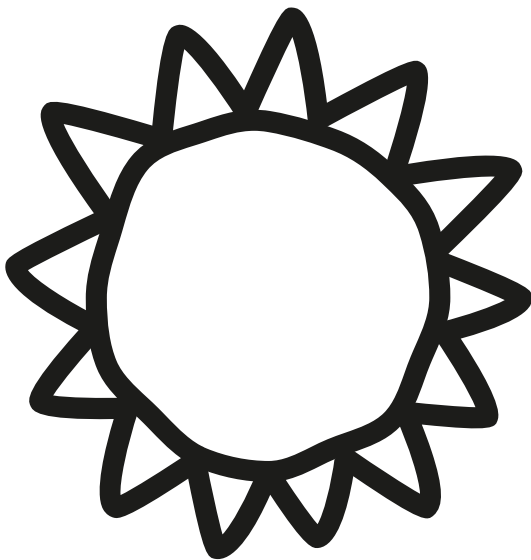
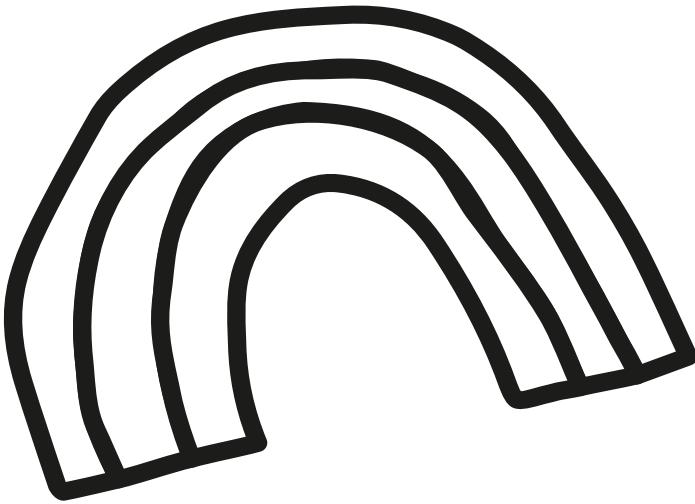
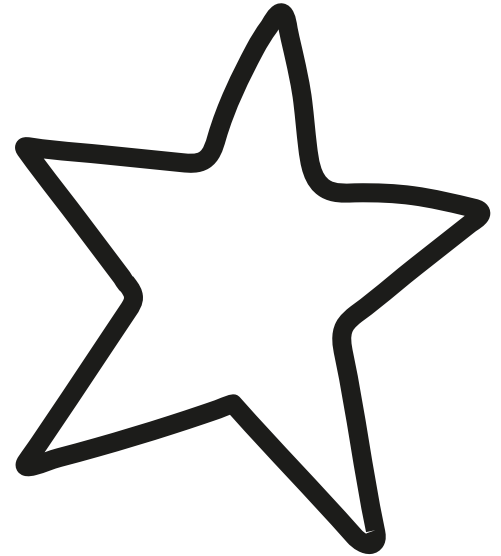
**ON OUR SLEEVES®**



What are you thankful for?

---

---



Name:

---

Age:

---

For mental health tips and information, visit [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org).

Because we don't wear our  
thoughts on our sleeves



## DEAR EDUCATOR,

As a teacher, you know that mental health plays an important part in every child's academic success. Schools and teachers are influential in the lives of students since a lot of their time is spent in school. For this reason, teachers are key in supporting wellness strategies that contribute to a positive academic experience.

Did you know that one in five children is living with a mental illness, and 50% of all lifetime mental illnesses start by age 14? Not only is it important to work individually with students who experience mental health challenges, but it is critical that we make sure every child feels comfortable talking about mental health and learns coping strategies.

To help you start this important conversation with your students, the curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired (YMI) have teamed up with Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Harlem Globetrotters to create this classroom program as part of the *On Our Sleeves*™ movement to break the silence and stigma surrounding children's mental health.

The *Share Your Feelings* program includes classroom activities to provide students with coping strategies that can help them overcome problems, manage relationships and school, and learn how to make themselves feel better. Students also learn tips to support their peers who may be experiencing mental health challenges. The activities reinforce social-emotional learning and language arts standards, and are designed to help you build a safe and empathetic classroom environment. The program also includes a letter for parents and guardians that we encourage you to send home to raise awareness about children's mental health and provide families with tips for speaking with children about this topic.

We hope you will share this program with other teachers at your school, as well as your school nurse and guidance counselors, to help break the stigma and expand the dialogue about mental health. Please take a moment to share your thoughts on these materials at [ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves](https://ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves). We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dominic Kinsley  
Editor in Chief  
Young Minds Inspired

### ON OUR SLEEVES

On Our Sleeves®, the movement for children's mental health, is powered by the experts at Nationwide Children's Hospital. Learn more at [OnOurSleeves.org](https://OnOurSleeves.org).



Questions? Contact YMI toll-free at 1-800-859-8005, or by email at [feedback@ymiclassroom.com](mailto:feedback@ymiclassroom.com).

### Target Audience

Students in grades 3-5 and their families

### Program Objectives

- ▶ Promote awareness of children's mental health and help break the stigma of mental health
- ▶ Provide children with tools and strategies for coping with feelings, including how to talk to a trusted adult
- ▶ Provide families with resources about children's mental health and tips for engaging their children in conversation to help them with coping strategies

### Program Components

- ▶ This teacher's guide
- ▶ Two reproducible activity sheets
- ▶ A two-page family take-home letter
- ▶ A standards alignment chart, available at [ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves](https://ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves)
- ▶ An online feedback form at [ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves](https://ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves)



## How to Use This Program

- ▶ Photocopy this teacher's guide and the student activity sheets, and review the materials and resources before starting. For background information on mental health, go to [ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves](http://ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves).
- ▶ Introduce the concept of mental health in Activity One. Each activity should take approximately 40 to 45 minutes. Extend as needed to continue the discussion.
- ▶ Encourage students to take the completed activity sheets home to share with their families. Also give them copies of the family take-home letter or include a link to the PDF in an email to parents and guardians. The letter includes tips to help families navigate discussions about mental health.
- ▶ Be prepared for questions and know your school's policy on mental health concerns. If a student reacts to the discussion or content, validate their feelings even if you don't understand the emotional response. Ask open-ended questions and don't get to a solution too quickly. Ask: *How can I help? What would help in this moment? What do you need to feel better?* Ask who their favorite person (adult) is at school and seek their assistance. Call parents if needed.
- ▶ If students comment that they sometimes hurt themselves to make themselves feel better, be prepared to respond in the moment and know who to notify and what kind of resources or professional help you might need.

### Activity One

## My Feelings, My Strategies

Your students may be familiar with certain mental health conditions and concerns, but may not be familiar with the term *mental health* or understand what it means. To help you start a classroom discussion about mental health, this activity focuses on feelings and coping strategies, while reinforcing the importance of talking to a trusted adult when students are overwhelmed by their feelings or when they are not sure how to manage them.

1. To introduce the topic, ask students to identify emotions or feelings and write them on the board.
2. Next, write the word *rain* on the board and ask students to write down how rain makes them feel, then share their responses. Are they all the same? Explain that rain may make people feel different ways—happy, sad, stressed, annoyed, etc. Add that this was a simple example to show students that we can all feel differently about a situation, and that our own feelings may change.
3. Next, ask students how people express their emotions or what they may be thinking. Answers may include facial expressions, actions, and words. Explain that people don't always say how they are feeling or what they are thinking. They may be concerned about showing their emotions or sharing their thoughts, or they may not know how to do so. And, we can't always assume we know how someone feels or what someone is thinking if they don't tell us.
4. Have students share their thoughts about mental health by asking the following questions and guiding the discussion with the notes in parentheses:
  - ▶ *Have you ever seen a TV show or movie that talked about mental health? If so, what does it mean?*
  - ▶ *What do you know about mental health? What have others said about it?* (Explain that we all experience feelings like sadness, anxiety, fear, worry, confusion, stress, irritability, etc., at times, but some people can experience these types of feelings more intensely and for longer periods of time and may need help and support to cope with their feelings. As friends, we want to support others who may be experiencing this and never make fun of them.)
  - ▶ *What are ways we can talk to our parents about mental health?* (Share things that concern us, tell them how we feel, ask for help, etc.)
  - ▶ *What are some things we do every day to help us stay physically healthy?* (Eat healthy foods, exercise, sleep, drink water, etc.)
  - ▶ *What are some ways we can stay mentally healthy every day?* (Engage in activities, do things with other people, rest our minds, exercise, take breaks from work, help others, etc.)
  - ▶ *What does the term "trusted adult" mean?* (A grown-up who makes you feel comfortable, and will listen and support you)
  - ▶ *How can we start talking about mental health with a trusted adult?* (Tell them that we have a concern or tell them how we're feeling. Be open and tell them we want to talk to get advice.)
  - ▶ *How do you deal with stressful situations? What do you do to make yourself feel good?* (See next page.)
5. Review and expand upon students' answers about how they deal with stressful situations. Explain that stress is a common part of every child's life. Children might worry about their appearance, tests, being accepted by friends, being



separated from family, as well as many other concerns. Some stress is normal, but too much stress can be unhealthy so it's important to have strategies for coping with it. For example:

- ▶ Talk with a trusted adult
  - ▶ Take deep breaths, count backward, or count spots on the floor
  - ▶ Make a fist and then relax your hand
  - ▶ Play your favorite music and sing along
  - ▶ Write in a journal, draw, or color
  - ▶ Call a friend
  - ▶ Go for a walk, exercise, or dance
  - ▶ Laugh—watch a funny movie, tell jokes, look at cute animal pictures
  - ▶ Play a game
  - ▶ Get enough sleep and eat healthy foods
  - ▶ Have a routine so you know what to expect
  - ▶ Have a plan or schedule for completing a school project or studying for a test
6. Distribute copies of the activity sheet. Part 1 features questions students can ask each other in small groups to encourage them to communicate, share their emotions, and get to know each other. In Part 2, students work in teams to brainstorm a list of ways they might cope with stress or other feelings, and identify trusted adults they can talk with. Invite student volunteers to share their coping strategies.

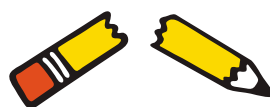
### Activity Two

## Act It Out

In this activity, students role-play situations that may be difficult for kids, to help reinforce how they might use coping strategies and to help build empathy for others.

1. Before starting, ask students how they could help a friend who may be having difficulty managing their feelings—maybe they are very worried, stressed, or sad a lot.
2. Review the tips on the activity sheet as a group.
3. Encourage students to recognize that, just like they should talk to a trusted adult to help themselves feel better, they can also talk with a trusted adult if they are concerned about a friend or want advice on how to help a friend. If a friend says something about hurting themselves, explain to students that they should tell a trusted adult, just as they would if their friend was sick or having an allergic reaction. Emphasize the importance of empathy when helping friends and others who may need support.
4. Distribute the activity sheet and review it with students. In Part 1, students reflect on how they might feel and react in a given situation. In Part 2, students consider how they might respond and help uplift a friend experiencing the situation.
5. For each situation, students should identify a trusted adult they can speak with when they are concerned about how they are feeling, as well as a coping strategy they could implement.
6. Have students work in small groups to discuss and act out the situations. As an alternative, discuss the scenarios as a group.

**Extension Activity:** To complement the *On Our Sleeves*™ icons, work with the art teacher to create an icon bulletin board on coping strategies. Have each student create two icons—one to represent a stressful feeling and one to represent a corresponding coping strategy. Search “icon collection” at [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org) for examples.



## Teacher Tips & Resources

The Nationwide Children's Hospital *On Our Sleeves*™ website has resources for educators on mental health topics and wellness. Visit [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org) for tips for working with students with mental illness, information about mental health conditions, where to find help, and more.

To help create a safe and empathetic environment:

- ▶ Encourage ongoing discussion about coping with feelings and remind students to talk to parents and other trusted adults when they need help with their feelings.
- ▶ Be aware of challenges your students may be facing and how best to support their learning.
- ▶ Be aware of signs that a student may have a mental health concern.
- ▶ Communicate with parents and caregivers.
- ▶ Integrate movement breaks into the day to help reduce stress.
- ▶ Create a “joke” time for kids to share jokes and a laugh.
- ▶ Create a wall with images that will help kids smile, like photos of puppies.
- ▶ Compliment students who may be struggling to give them a boost and to let them—and others in the class—know they are valued.

# MY FEELINGS, MY STRATEGIES

Sometimes it can be difficult to share how we feel or what we are thinking. But people cannot read our minds, so it's important to communicate our feelings, especially if we need help to feel better.



**Part 1:** With your partner or group, take turns asking each other the questions below and answering them to get to know each other.

1. What makes you super happy?
2. What is the scariest thing you can think of?
3. What do you really like to do with your family?
4. Do you have a favorite song? What is it?
5. What is your favorite holiday? What do you like about it?

**Part 2:** Some situations and feelings are easy to cope with, others are not. On the first line of each sentence below, write a feeling such as stressed, worried, sad, or confused. On the second line, write something you can do to make yourself feel better when you're feeling this way. Check out the example.



- ▶ If I feel stressed, I could sing and dance to my favorite song.
- ▶ If I feel \_\_\_\_\_, I could \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ If I feel \_\_\_\_\_, I could \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ If I feel \_\_\_\_\_, I could \_\_\_\_\_.
- ▶ If I feel \_\_\_\_\_, I could \_\_\_\_\_.

**Remember!** Talk to a trusted adult about how you're feeling so they can help you. Who are your trusted adults?

## FAMILY NOTE



As a family, talk about the questions above, and then brainstorm your own list of at-home conversation starters. Have each family member write a set of questions and then place them in a paper bag or on a chart. Select a question each day to discuss during a quiet time when you can focus on the conversation, such as dinner, breakfast, on the way to school, or on a family walk.

**ON OUR SLEEVES**  
On Our Sleeves™, the movement for children's mental health, is powered by the experts at Nationwide Children's Hospital. Learn more at [OnOurSleeves.org](http://OnOurSleeves.org).



# ACT IT OUT

You've been talking about things you can do to help make yourself feel better when you have different emotions. And you've also talked about how to help a friend. Now, act it out! This can help prepare you if you do find yourself in a similar situation.



## Part 1: What would you do if you were in this situation?

For each situation below, answer these three questions. Then act out the situation with your group.

- ▶ How would you feel?
  - ▶ Which trusted adult could you talk to about the situation?
  - ▶ What could you do to help make yourself feel better?
1. You have a big math test coming up. You're nervous about the test.
  2. You're about to join a new soccer team. You're excited, but nervous at the same time.
  3. Your older brother teases you constantly about how you look and dress.
  4. Your mom travels a lot for work, and you miss her.



## TIPS FOR HELPING A FRIEND

- ▶ **Check in.** Let your friends know you are there if they want to talk. Ask questions to learn how you can be helpful. Include them in plans to let them know they aren't alone.
- ▶ **Watch what you say.** If a friend is struggling with bad feelings, don't say mean things or make fun of them. Just reassure them you are there for them.
- ▶ **Talk to someone you trust.** It's ok to feel confused or hurt by things a friend has said or done. Talk to a trusted adult about how you are feeling and how you can talk with your friend.
- ▶ **Just be there.** When a friend is going through changes, the best thing you can do is ask how you can support them.

## Part 2: What could you do if your friend was in this situation?

For each situation below, answer these three questions. Then act out the situation with your group.

- ▶ What might your friend be feeling?
  - ▶ Which trusted adult could you talk to about your friend's situation?
  - ▶ What could you do to help make your friend feel better?
1. Your friend is called names and is pushed by an older student. He is afraid to go to the cafeteria.
  2. Your friend takes medicine to help her feel less anxious. She is worried people will tease her.
  3. You and your friend try out for the school play. You get a role, but your friend does not.
  4. Your friend thinks that his older sister is smoking, and he is worried about her.



## FAMILY NOTE

Talk with your children about the scenarios above. Ask them to share how they would respond. Open the dialogue by letting your children know if you've ever experienced any of these situations or similar ones as a child.

**ON OUR SLEEVES**  
On Our Sleeves®, the movement for children's mental health, is powered by the experts at Nationwide Children's Hospital. Learn more at [OnOurSleeves.org](http://OnOurSleeves.org).



Because we don't wear our  
thoughts on our sleeves



## DEAR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS.

In school, your child has been learning about mental health and strategies for coping with stress and other feelings through a program that is part of the *On Our Sleeves* movement, created by the curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired (YMI) in cooperation with Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Harlem Globetrotters. The *On Our Sleeves*™ movement is a national movement to break the silence and stigma surrounding children's mental health and start important conversations about this topic.

The program emphasizes the importance of kids sharing their feelings and what's on their minds with parents and trusted adults who can help them get to a place where they feel better. It is not uncommon to struggle with emotional or mental health concerns periodically. These strategies can help with managing and reducing symptoms and/or risks. Kids may be reluctant or not know how to speak about what they're feeling inside. But these are important conversations. One in five children is living with a mental illness, but only about half get help. That's why it is important to be on the lookout for early warning signs and learn how to address your child's needs.

### Mental Fitness Activities

As a family, make an effort to stay mentally fit and help alleviate stress—play board games, meditate, go for walks after dinner, do volunteer work, and try the *On Our Sleeves* Mental Fitness Challenge (see link on resource list). Use the time to connect with your children about how they're feeling.

### Start the Conversation

When speaking with your child about mental health and how they're feeling, give them your full attention so they can talk about things they may be having a hard time handling or that are upsetting them. Keep it simple. For example:

- ▶ Ask your child, "What was the best thing about your day?" And then "What was something not so great about your day?"
- ▶ Ask follow-up questions and use feelings words to assess what you think you're hearing, such as, "Sounds like you were mad that Emma did not play with you at recess"; "Sounds like you're upset that you didn't do well on your test."
- ▶ Acknowledge that it's OK to have these feelings and encourage your child to talk about them with you. Consider offering appropriate examples of your own day to reinforce this. It's important in these conversations not to lead a child to believe that certain emotions are "right" or "wrong." Encourage them to talk about their feelings. Don't force the discussion and stop when your child is ready.
- ▶ Talk about how your child might manage these feelings to help them build coping strategies, such as counting, drawing, listening to music, thinking about something fun, etc.

Check out the links on the next page for more information on how to start the conversation.



Learn more about mental illness and *On Our Sleeves*™ at [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org).

If you or your child need immediate help due to having suicidal thoughts, go to your local emergency room immediately, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text "START" to 741-741 to reach the Crisis Text Line.

# ON OUR SLEEVES ONLINE TOOLS & RESOURCES

Children and families facing mental illness are not alone. The Nationwide Children's Hospital *On Our Sleeves*™ website has information about mental health conditions and behavioral concerns, along with tools that may be helpful if your child is exhibiting these behaviors:

- ▶ Guides on how to talk to kids about mental health, stress, healthy habits and more:  
[OnOurSleeves.org/mental-wellness-tools-guides](https://OnOurSleeves.org/mental-wellness-tools-guides)
- ▶ Videos featuring behavioral health expert Gina McDowell:  
[YouTube.com/OnOurSleeves](https://YouTube.com/OnOurSleeves)
- ▶ Locator tool to find children's mental health resources in your state:  
[OnOurSleeves.org/Find-Help](https://OnOurSleeves.org/Find-Help)



## ON OUR SLEEVES™

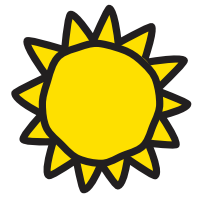
On Our Sleeves™, the movement for children's mental health, is powered by the experts at Nationwide Children's Hospital. Learn more at [OnOurSleeves.org](https://OnOurSleeves.org).



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# Take a Day Time Break to Support Your Students' Mental Wellness



## DEAR EDUCATOR,

As a teacher, you know that mental wellbeing plays a key role in a student's academic and personal success. But did you know that one in five children is living with a mental health condition, and that 50% of all lifelong mental health conditions begin by age 14? Unlike physical health, mental health is largely misunderstood and stigmatized in our society. Because we don't wear our thoughts on our sleeves, we don't always know what children are going through on the inside.

Children need support navigating their thoughts and feelings, and teachers can play a vital role in this effort. The curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired (YMI) have teamed up with the **On Our Sleeves**® movement to transform children's mental health to help. Powered by the experts at **Nationwide Children's Hospital**, *On Our Sleeves* aims to break the silence and stigma surrounding children's mental health. The activities are designed for grades 6–8 and reinforce social-emotional learning, and health and language arts standards.

Through discussion and collaboration, students will learn mental health facts, dispel myths, and develop practical strategies for building empathy and improving self-care. The program also features activities to help your students *Take a Day Time Break* to boost mental wellbeing, as well as a take-home letter for parents and caregivers to raise awareness about children's mental health.

We hope you will share this program with other teachers at your school, as well as your school nurse, coaches, and guidance counselors, to help break the stigma and expand the dialogue around mental health. Please take a moment to share your thoughts on these materials at [ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves](https://www.ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves). We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Dominic Kinsley, PhD  
Editor in Chief  
Young Minds Inspired

 Questions? Contact YMI toll-free at 1-800-859-8005, or by email at [feedback@ymiclassroom.com](mailto:feedback@ymiclassroom.com).

**ON OUR SLEEVES**®  
The Movement for Children's Mental Health

## Target Audience

Students in grades 6–8, teachers, and parents/caregivers

## Program Objectives

- ▶ Promote the mental wellbeing of children
- ▶ Develop understanding of common mental health conditions and dispel myths
- ▶ Encourage children to discuss their thoughts and feelings with trusted adults
- ▶ Help students develop practical strategies for building empathy and improving self-care
- ▶ Provide families with resources and tips for talking with children about mental health

## Program Components

Available at [ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves](https://www.ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves):

- ▶ This teacher's guide
- ▶ Two reproducible student activity sheets
- ▶ A reproducible parent/caregiver letter
- ▶ A standards alignment chart
- ▶ An online feedback form

The *On Our Sleeves* "Take a Day Time Break" mental wellness program is an ongoing mission of Christina and Ryan Day, strong advocates for *On Our Sleeves* to help start conversations around children's mental health. The Day Family's commitment extends their social mission to one of the most significant issues facing children and young adults by increasing education, advocacy, and fundraising. To learn more, please visit [OnOurSleeves.org/DayFamilyFund](https://www.OnOurSleeves.org/DayFamilyFund).



## How to Use This Program

Photocopy this teacher's guide and the student activity sheets, and review the materials and resources before starting. Each activity should take approximately 30 to 40 minutes. Encourage students to take the completed activity sheets home to share with their families. Also give them copies of the parent/caregiver letter with tips to help families navigate discussions around mental health to take home.

Be prepared for students who may have questions or a concerning response to these activities, and know your school's policy on mental health concerns. Validate students' feelings even if you don't necessarily understand them. Ask open-ended questions such as: *How can I help? What would help in this moment? What do you need to feel better?* Ask who their most trusted person (adult) is at school and seek their assistance. Call a parent or caregiver so that they are aware of the situation.

If students comment that they sometimes hurt themselves to make themselves feel better, be prepared to respond in the moment and know who to notify and what kind of resources or professional help you might need.



### Activity 1:

## Mental Health Myths & Facts

Your students may be familiar with certain mental health conditions but may not be familiar with the term *mental health* or understand what it means. This activity focuses on sharing facts, dispelling myths, and supporting self-care strategies to improve mental health and wellbeing.

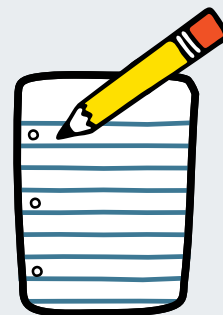
1. Have students share what they know or think by asking the following questions and guiding the discussion with the notes in parentheses:
  - ▶ *What does "mental health" mean?* (Encourage students to brainstorm, even if their responses reflect misperceptions. Then share the following definition: Mental health includes how we think, feel, and act. It also helps guide how we handle stress, relate to other people, and make decisions.)
  - ▶ *What does it mean to have a mental health condition?* (We all experience sadness, fear, worry, confusion, or stress at times, but some people can experience these types of feelings more intensely and for longer periods of time, and may need help and support to cope.)

## TEACHER TIPS & RESOURCES

The Nationwide Children's Hospital *On Our Sleeves* website has extensive resources for educators. Visit [OnOurSleeves.org/mental-health-resources](https://www.onoursleeves.org/mental-health-resources) for information about mental health conditions, where to find help, wellness strategies, videos, and more.

To promote a safe and empathetic classroom environment:

- ▶ Encourage ongoing discussion about coping with feelings and remind students to talk to parents/caregivers and other trusted adults when they need help.
- ▶ Be aware of challenges your students may be facing and how best to support their learning.
- ▶ Show support for students who may be struggling to let them know they are valued.
- ▶ Have a "zero-tolerance" policy for bullying behaviors, such as physical intimidation, name-calling, and teasing.
- ▶ Use non-stigmatizing language so students see people first and disorders second (e.g., say "She has depression" instead of "She is depressed").
- ▶ Work with students to create a wall of images that make them smile, like photos of favorite athletes or singers.



2. Distribute copies of the activity sheet. Read the directions for **Part 1**, which features a true/false quiz about mental health. Let students know that this activity is not a test — it is to get them thinking about mental health and what they might know or have heard so you can have a class discussion to dispel any myths or misunderstandings. Have students complete the quiz and then discuss the answers below as a class. Be sure students adjust any incorrect answers and encourage them to bring their completed quizzes home to share with their families.

**Answers: 1.** True (Your health involves much more than what is happening in your physical body. Your mind and body are closely linked. To achieve the best overall health outcome, you want to focus on your physical health *and* your mental health or fitness.) **2.** False (Mental health conditions can affect people of all ages, so it is important for all of us to take care of our mental wellbeing.) **3.** False (We don't know what others are experiencing since we don't wear our thoughts on our sleeves. A person may not understand his or her feelings, may feel nervous or embarrassed to express them, or may not have the words to do so.) **4.** True (It's important to ask for help if you are struggling with your feelings. It's also important to be sensitive, supportive, and caring to others since we don't know what they are experiencing. Never make fun of someone's mental health challenges, call them names, or make light of their feelings.) **5.** False (Anyone can experience problems with their mental health, including those who may seem happy or successful on the outside.)

Conclude Part 1 by emphasizing that students should always talk with a trusted adult if they are stressed or troubled by their emotions or if they are worried about a friend.

3. Direct students to **Part 2** of the activity sheet, a matching exercise involving three mental health disorders and two wellness practices. Have students work in pairs to match the terms with their definitions. If they are unsure, encourage them to make their best guesses based on context clues. Afterward, discuss the answers as a class.

**Answers: 1.** Depression = B; **2.** Self-Care = E; **3.** ADHD = A; **4.** Anxiety = D; **5.** Gratitude = C

Tell students that a **mental health condition** (like depression, anxiety, and ADHD) is a brain disorder that affects how someone thinks and feels, and often, how they relate to others. Explain that self-care and gratitude are **mental wellness** practices, which can help you improve your mental health.

4. Introduce the concept of **Day Time Breaks**. Explain that just as you practice a sport or activity to get better at it, you can also practice "mental fitness" by pausing in the middle of the day to focus on your emotional wellbeing. Lead the following activities:
  - ▶ **What I Like About Myself:** Say: *Positive thinking is connected to mental health and wellness. Think about something you like about yourself and why you like it. Write it on a note to yourself.* Invite students to share, but only if they want to. As an extension, encourage students to take a "What I Like About Myself" selfie or draw a picture representing something they like about themselves.

- ▶ **Gratitude:** Say: *Gratitude is the act of showing appreciation and of being thankful. Research shows that people who practice gratitude — who recognize and feel good about the good things in their life — are healthier and happier. They feel more energized, sleep better, have stronger social connections, and feel better about themselves. Gratitude helps us grow mentally and grow as a person. What is something you're grateful for? Write it on a note to yourself.* Invite students to share, but only if they want to.

Read the directions for **Part 3** and have students create gratitude emojis on the back of the activity sheet. Create a "Gratitude Emoji" wall display where students can post their images — anonymously if they prefer.



## Activity 2: Take Care

To further develop students' mental health awareness and boost self-care practices and empathy, this activity asks students to role-play scenarios that might cause a person stress, and brainstorm coping strategies.

1. Explain that stress is a common part of every person's life. As students, they might feel stressed about being accepted by friends, their appearance, tests, doing well in sports or other activities, and other concerns. Ask: *How do you deal with stressful situations? What do you do to make yourself feel better?*
2. Distribute copies of the activity sheet and review the directions for **Part 1**. Invite volunteers to read the list of coping strategies. For each item, ask students why they think that strategy would be helpful in managing stress. Then have them add two additional (healthy and appropriate) strategies they use or would like to try, and how these are effective "stress busters."
3. Next, review the directions for **Part 2**. Scenarios 1 and 2 encourage students to reflect on how they might feel and react if the situation happened to them. Scenarios 3 and 4 focus on helping a friend with a distressing situation.
4. Place students in small groups and encourage them to have open, respectful discussions about the scenarios on the list. For each item, students will identify how they or their friend might be feeling and why (this builds empathy), a trusted adult they could speak with, and coping strategies they could implement. Afterward, have groups volunteer to act out the scenarios.

**Possible Answers: 1.** Work with your teacher to create a plan or schedule to prepare for the test. Before the test, get a good night's sleep, eat a healthy breakfast, and try some breathing and relaxation techniques.

**2.** Talk to a trusted adult, like a parent/caregiver or school counselor, about how you are feeling and how you can talk with your friend. Write in a journal to help work through your thoughts and emotions. Make an art project for your friend to show how much you care about them.

**3.** Support your friend by doing things together: take a walk, watch funny videos, or talk about happy memories. Encourage your friend to talk to her mom about her concerns for her family. **4.** Speak out against unkind behavior and let your teacher know. Check in with your friend. When a friend is going through changes, the best thing you can do is ask how you can support them.

**5.** To conclude the activity, tell students that they can become mental health advocates by starting a *"Take a Day Time Break Club"* to support self-care. In their groups, invite students to brainstorm quick, easy-to-implement mental health wellness activities to integrate into your classroom routine. Have groups share their ideas and agree on five activities to try over the coming week. Designate a daily 5- to 10-minute break

to do the chosen activities as a class. Set up a box for students to submit new ideas and keep the breaks going throughout the month. **Sample ideas:**

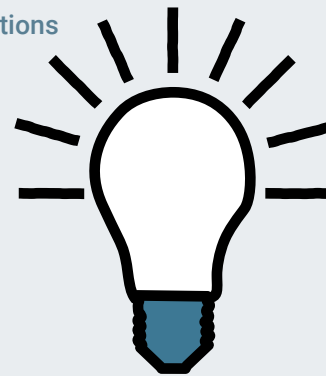
- ▶ Write a compliment or message of encouragement to a classmate.
- ▶ Create a class gratitude list by posting sticky notes on the bulletin board.
- ▶ Write down a personal goal and steps you will take to achieve this goal.
- ▶ Perform a random act of kindness (or make a plan to perform one).
- ▶ Stretch, do jumping jacks – or have a dance party!

## Reproducible Parent/ Caregiver Letter

Studies have shown that many parents and caregivers feel apprehension and confusion about children's mental health topics. Many still maintain a stigma around mental health, hold misperceptions about mental health conditions, and are unsure how to talk to their children about these topics. We encourage you to copy and send home this letter, email it to families, or post it on your school website to support families.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ Understand Mental Health Conditions  
[OnOurSleeves.org/mental-health-resources/medical-conditions](https://onoursleeves.org/mental-health-resources/medical-conditions)
- ▶ *Take a Day Time Break* (additional resources for your classroom, such as posters, stickers, etc.)  
[OnOurSleeves.org/about/day-family-fund/request-day-time-resources](https://onoursleeves.org/about/day-family-fund/request-day-time-resources)
- ▶ Resources for Schools  
[OnOurSleeves.org/for-professionals/schools](https://onoursleeves.org/for-professionals/schools)
- ▶ Day Time Break Information for Schools  
[youtu.be/jC0kkjCrKNA](https://youtu.be/jC0kkjCrKNA)
- ▶ Day Time Break: Overview  
[youtu.be/0U3md2bZ\\_9w](https://youtu.be/0U3md2bZ_9w)



# MENTAL HEALTH MYTHS & FACTS



Mental health is an important topic. If you're physically hurt or ill, it can be obvious and easy to see – and easier to describe in words. But because we don't wear our thoughts on our sleeves, mental health can be harder to understand and talk about.

**Part 1:** Below are some statements about mental health. Some of them are true (facts), and some are not (myths). On the right side of the table, write "True" or "False" based on what you know.

STATEMENT	TRUE OR FALSE?
1. Keeping your brain in shape is just as important as physical fitness.	
2. Mental health conditions are not really something kids struggle with.	
3. You can tell how someone is feeling or if they have a mental health condition just by looking at them or listening to what they are saying.	
4. Friends and family can make a big difference in supporting each other's mental health.	
5. Kids who have lots of friends, get good grades, and have lots of talents are always happy on the inside.	

**Part 2:** The terms below describe some mental health conditions and behaviors. Match each term to its definition by writing the correct letter on each line.

MENTAL HEALTH TERMS	DEFINITIONS
1. ____ Depression	<b>A.</b> People with this condition tend to have a high energy level and have trouble focusing on the task before them.
2. ____ Self-Care	<b>B.</b> This condition lasts longer and feels stronger or different from typical sadness. Sometimes it is a feeling of hopelessness.
3. ____ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	<b>C.</b> This practice involves thinking and talking about things you are thankful for, in order to boost your mood and remind yourself of the good things in your life.
4. ____ Anxiety	<b>D.</b> People with this condition have a prolonged sense of worry and dread that can impact all aspects of their daily life.
5. ____ Gratitude	<b>E.</b> These behaviors include eating healthy, getting good sleep, moving a little bit every day, and creating positive relationships with family and friends to help keep the mind fit and healthy.

**Part 3: Take a Day Time Break!** Just as you practice a sport or activity to get better at it, you can also practice bettering your mental health. One way to do that is by thinking about things that make you feel good and that you're thankful for. Create your own "gratitude emoji" on the back of this sheet. Ask yourself this question as you create your emoji: **What does gratitude look like to me?**

**REMEMBER:** It's ok not to feel ok. If you're ever struggling, reach out to a trusted adult like a parent, family member, teacher, coach, or guidance counselor.



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The Movement for Children's Mental Health

# TAKE CARE

**We all feel stressed sometimes. Some stress is normal, but too much isn't good for you, so it's important to know how to take care of yourself and manage the stress you feel. Below is a list of self-care strategies you can try to help yourself feel better — calmer, happier, more in control — if you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed:**

- ▶ Talk with a parent or another trusted adult about your feelings.
- ▶ Take deep breaths: inhale for three, hold for three, exhale for three, repeat.
- ▶ Play your favorite music and sing along.
- ▶ Write in a journal or draw/sketch.
- ▶ Close your eyes and imagine visiting your favorite place.
- ▶ Call or text a friend.
- ▶ Make a plan or schedule for completing a school project or studying for a test.
- ▶ Go for a walk, exercise, or dance.
- ▶ Laugh — watch a funny video, tell jokes, look at silly memes or GIFs.
- ▶ Do a "body scan" where you slowly relax from your head to your toes.
- ▶ Get enough sleep and eat healthy foods.


**Part 1:** Use this chart to list other healthy things you do that help when you are in a stressful situation. Then explain how each self-care strategy helps you feel better.

MY SELF-CARE STRATEGY	HOW IT HELPS ME FEEL BETTER
1.	
2.	

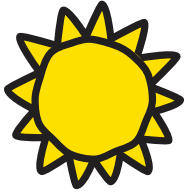
**Part 2:** Now, practice using self-care strategies with the situations described below. These are all situations that might be stressful or upsetting to you or a friend. For each one, discuss these questions with your group:

- ▶ *What feelings might each person be having, and why?*
  - ▶ *Which trusted adult could the person talk to about the situation?*
  - ▶ *What are some things the person could do to help cope with their feelings?*
1. You are not doing too well in history class and have a big test coming up. You need to get a good grade to pass the class.
  2. You have just gotten into a fight with a friend and they're really mad at you. You want to work it out, but don't know how to talk to them about it.
  3. Your friend's mom lost her job and your friend is worried about her family. Your friend seems much more anxious than usual.
  4. Your friend takes a prescribed medication for depression. He does not like to talk about it. Some classmates found out and have been teasing him.

When you're done, role-play each scenario. Assign the characters in each situation to the people in your group. Then, volunteer to show your class the self-care strategies you came up with.



**Remember: If you have a friend who is struggling with feelings, show empathy and let them know you're there if they want to talk. You can also reach out to a trusted adult to talk about how you can help your friend.**



# Take a Day Time Break to Support Your Child's Mental Wellness

## DEAR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS,

When a child has a physical illness, we know what to do. But navigating mental health concerns can be more challenging. Unlike most physical illnesses, there are no blood tests, imaging scans, or other objective measures to detect most mental illnesses. Sometimes warning signs can even be mistaken for typical developmental changes.

To help you and your child become more informed about mental health, the **On Our Sleeves**® movement to transform children's mental health has teamed with the curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired to create an in-school mental health wellness program called *Take a Day Time Break*. The program aims to correct misunderstandings about mental health conditions, and provides students with some practical strategies to build empathy and improve self-care.

Backed by the experts at **Nationwide Children's Hospital**, *On Our Sleeves* aims to break the silence and stigma surrounding children's mental health. We know that one in five children is living with a mental health condition that interferes with everyday life, and that half of all lifetime mental health conditions start by age 14. Kids don't wear their thoughts on their sleeves, but when they are struggling, they need support. Therefore, it's important that parents and caregivers build awareness about mental health.

## Conversation Starters

Helping children talk about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences can provide a safe opportunity for them to work through things they are having a hard time handling or that are upsetting them. Below are some "convo starters" the *On Our Sleeves* team has created to help you discuss everyday thoughts and feelings with your child. Try out a few. You might be surprised by your child's willingness to open up when they know they're supported!

- ▶ When you feel sad, what do you think about to help yourself feel happy again?
- ▶ Tell me three words to describe yourself.
- ▶ What makes you angry? What helps you to feel less angry?
- ▶ How has someone been kind to you today? How were you kind to someone else?
- ▶ What do you do when someone makes fun of other kids at school?

For more conversation starters, visit [OnOurSleeves.org/mental-wellness-tools-guides/conversation-starters/kids-discussion-guide](https://OnOurSleeves.org/mental-wellness-tools-guides/conversation-starters/kids-discussion-guide).

The *On Our Sleeves* "Take a Day Time Break" mental wellness program is an ongoing mission of Christina and Ryan Day, strong advocates for *On Our Sleeves* to help start conversations around children's mental health. The Day Family's commitment extends their social mission to one of the most significant issues facing children and young adults by increasing education, advocacy, and fundraising.

To learn more, please visit [OnOurSleeves.org/DayFamilyFund](https://OnOurSleeves.org/DayFamilyFund).



## Take a Day Time Break

At school, your child has learned that taking a "Day Time Break" for mental wellness can help reduce stress and promote empathy. Spend a few minutes a day taking a break as a family with activities such as giving a compliment to each family member, doing an errand or chore for a neighbor, taking a walk outdoors, or turning the refrigerator door into a gratitude wall with sticky notes. Generate your own *Day Time Break* ideas together!

For more ideas, go to: [OnOurSleeves.org/about/day-family-fund/request-day-time-resources](https://OnOurSleeves.org/about/day-family-fund/request-day-time-resources).

## Additional Resources

- ▶ Understand Mental Health Conditions: [OnOurSleeves.org/mental-health-resources/medical-conditions](https://OnOurSleeves.org/mental-health-resources/medical-conditions)
- ▶ Mental Health Resources: [OnOurSleeves.org/mental-health-resources](https://OnOurSleeves.org/mental-health-resources)
- ▶ Videos with behavioral health expert Gina McDowell: [youtube.com/c/OnOurSleeves/videos](https://youtube.com/c/OnOurSleeves/videos)  
For example:
  - \* *Questions to Ask at the Dinner Table*
  - \* *How to Get Mentally Fit*
  - \* *Stress and Self-Care*



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If you or your child need immediate help due to having suicidal thoughts, go to your local emergency room immediately. Or you can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or text "START" to 741-741.



# Let's Get Mentally Fit

## Instructions:

We've all set resolutions that deal with our physical health, but have you ever set a resolution to help your mental health?

Keeping our brain in shape is just as important as our physical fitness. Below is a guide to practice mental fitness in the classroom. Make sure to general guide below to introducing the activity.

We've also included a 22 day mental fitness challenge that you can print or email and send home with families.

## Before First Activity Implementation

Today, we are going to talk about the importance of mental health. Keeping our brain in shape is just as important as our physical fitness. That's why we are going to practice mental fitness.

How would you define mental health? And why is it important?

### *(Classroom Discussion)*

A person's mental health is just as important as their physical health. You may be physically well, or you may have a condition or concern that interferes with your physical well-being. Likewise you may be mentally well, or you may have a condition or concern that interferes with your mental health and well-being. We also know that people who have physical health problems can sometimes experience mental health concerns, like depression, as a result. And people with a mental health condition can experience physical health problems, like headaches, stomach aches or trouble sleeping.

We all experience sadness, anxiety, fear, worry, confusion or stress at times, but some people can experience these types of feelings more intensely and for longer periods of time, and may need help and support to cope with these feelings.

Today, we're going to do an exercise to help provide more knowledge about wellness, give tips and create awareness about mental health. Because just like you practice for a sport or activity to get better, you can also practice bettering your mental health.

## Day 1

For today's mental fitness challenge, we'll talk about gratitude or being grateful. Gratitude is showing others that you are thankful. It is also being able to show appreciation for the kindness we receive and a willingness to return that kindness to others. Practicing gratitude connects us with others and helps us feel more positive — which in turn, helps our mental health and well-being. Right now, take a brief break to think about what you are grateful for. Would anyone like to share their thoughts?

**Discussion: Share what you are grateful for or examples of things to be grateful; please do not force anyone to share.**

Thanks for participating in today's exercise to focus on our mental health and well-being!

## Day 2

Our mental fitness challenge today is writing a compliment or message of encouragement to a classmate. Genuine compliments or words of encouragement help create positive feelings and boost a person's sense of self-worth. These are

*(Continued)*



important to a person's mental health and simple ways that you can support others.

Get out a piece of paper and write a note to someone you know and want to share a compliment with, or someone you think could use an encouraging boost. Later, if you are comfortable, you could share that note with them.

Thanks for participating in today's exercise to focus on our mental health and well-being!

### Day 3

Today's mental fitness challenge is related to goals. Do you want to make a sports team this year? Or get a certain ACT score so you can get into college? Or find a job so you can have your own money? Or start hanging out with a different group of friends? Or maybe you want to get a better grade on a test. Think of anything you want to have as a goal. It doesn't matter how big or small it is. Think about one thing you want to accomplish this year. Write down steps to achieve this goal. Then, think about who can be helpful to you and what you will need to be successful. Taking small steps to achieve your goals can improve your sense of accomplishment, and as a result, your mental health. And remember to celebrate the small accomplishments along the way to reaching your goal.

Write down your goal now and the steps you will take to achieve this accomplishment.

Would anyone like to share?

**Discussion: Share a goal you have or examples you have; please do not force anyone to share.**

Thanks for participating in today's exercise to focus on our mental health and well-being!

### Day 4

It's now time for our mental fitness challenge. We're going to focus on positivity because positive thinking is associated with mental health and wellness. Sometimes it's easier to think of something nice to say about someone else than it is to say nice things about ourselves. Your mental health exercise today is to think about something you like about yourself. Even if this is hard for you, try to think about one positive quality you have and why you like it.

Would anyone like to share?

**Discussion: Share what you like about yourself or provide examples of items; please do not force anyone to share.**

Thanks for participating in today's exercise to focus on our mental health and well-being!

### Day 5

I hope our mental fitness challenge this week has shown you the importance of mental well-being and demonstrated that focusing on self-care and validation for just a few minutes each day can help you stay mentally fit. A quick tip for today is to remember to practice self-care. Self-care is vital to your success in school and life. Practice self-care by eating healthy, getting good sleep, moving a little bit every day and creating healthy relationships with family and friends.

Some other ways you can take a break are by taking a walk, performing a random act of kindness or limiting screen time. Would any of you like to share other ways you take a break for your mental health?

**Discussion: Show how you are going to focus on self-care or provide examples. Please do not force anyone to share.**

Please know that it's ok to not feel ok. If you are ever struggling, please reach out to a trusted adult like a teacher, coach or guidance counselor. Thank you all for your participation!

# Mental Fitness Challenge

Keeping our brain in shape is just as important as physical fitness. Try doing one of these tips every weekday!



**1.** Over dinner, talk about 3 things you are grateful for.



**2.** Take a walk.



**3.** Send an email/message to someone you love.



**4.** Allow yourself to be present in the moment.



**5.** Plan a family activity night, like game night or movie night.



**6.** This morning, talk about what you are most excited for today.



**7.** Donate to or volunteer at an organization.



**8.** Draw a picture of someone or something you are grateful for.



**9.** Make a list of 3 things you want to do this year.



**10.** Sing a song together.



**11.** Limit screen time today.



**12.** Read a book.



**13.** Make dinner together.



**14.** Smile and say hello to every person you see today.



**15.** Focus on the positive. Try not to complain about anything today.



**16.** Ask your kids to share one thing they like about themselves and why.



**17.** Write down one thing you want to get done this weekend – and do it.



**18.** Do one random act of kindness today.



**19.** Color a picture.



**20.** Go to sleep a half hour earlier.



**21.** Send a text message to someone you miss.



**22.** You decide: How will you be mentally fit today?

For more mental health tips and information, visit [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org). Share how you're being mentally fit. Use [#OnOurSleeves](https://twitter.com/OnOurSleeves) on social media.