



Understanding Mental Wellness Curriculum Guide

WHY THIS COURSE?

Physical health has been a part of schools' curricula for over 150 years which has led to a positive framing of physical health as it relates to a person's life. Educational institutions are just beginning to address mental health in the same way. Mental wellness is an important part of overall health, but mental health is often misunderstood or mistaken for mental illness. This course fills a need as schools seek to incorporate more ways to address the mental health needs of students.

The *Understanding Mental Wellness* course blends evidence-informed content with engaging digital activities. By defining what mental wellness is and modeling positive behaviors this online program teaches students the importance of paying attention to their mental health. This course explores the difference between mental wellness and mental illness, and provides strategies for coping during stress or mental health challenges. The course shows the impact of thought patterns, trauma, stigma, and times of uncertainty. Suicide prevention and when to seek help for yourself or others is also covered.

Six lessons scaffold students' knowledge to build a comprehensive understanding of what mental wellness is and how to maintain or achieve it. Interactive scenarios and digital stories allow students to face stressful situations and manage their mental health effectively while learning how to identify warning signs and how to get help for themselves and for others.

The first five lessons contain a pre- and post-assessment to measure knowledge gain throughout. The sixth lesson is application-based. Additionally, students complete a survey at the start and end of the course, to evaluate attitudinal and behavioral change.

KEY DETAILS

Course Length: 6 Lessons, approximately 10-20 minutes each

Target Audience: Grade 8-10

Subject Fit: Health

Standard Alignment: National Health Education Standards (NHES); State Academic Health Standards

TOPIC AREAS

1. Introduction to Mental Health
2. Understanding Mental Health Challenges
3. Mental Health Coping Strategies
4. Staying Healthy in Times of Uncertainty
5. Seeking and Offering Help
6. Creating a Supportive Mental Health Plan

COURSE STRUCTURE

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| Pre-survey | Module 1: Introduction to Mental Health | Module 2: Understanding Mental Health Challenges | Module 3: Mental Health Coping Strategies | Module 4: Staying Healthy in Times of Uncertainty | Module 5: Seeking and Offering Help | Module 6: Creating a Supportive Mental Health Plan | Post-survey |
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The online lessons are accompanied by offline lesson plans to extend the concepts, discussions, skills, and strategies learned in the online course.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Understanding Mental Wellness consists of:

- *Mental Health Resources:* Students are provided a list of free resources for help if they or someone they know needs assistance.
- *Lessons:* The course consists of 5 online modules, each lasting approximately 10-15 minutes. Students must complete each lesson in sequential order.
- *Assessments:* Each lesson contains a 5 question pre- and post-assessment to measure knowledge gains.
- *Reflection Questions:* Each lesson contains pre- and post- reflection questions to give students a chance to consider how information impacts their lives.
- *External Resources:* You can extend the digital program with additional lessons and discussion guides.

Detailed Course Outline:

Lesson 1: Introduction to Mental Health

Students are introduced to the course, take Survey 1, and learn what mental wellness is, how to strengthen it and protect it from the everyday threats from stress.

Learning Objectives:

- Define mental health.
- List behaviors and factors that maintain and contribute to positive mental health.
- Define stress and explain how it interacts with mental health.
- List behaviors and factors that threaten mental health.

DETAILED COURSE OUTLINE

Lesson 1: Introduction to Mental Health

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| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| Mental Health Resources | A list of hotlines and support available for young people dealing with mental health challenges. These resources can be accessed at any time throughout the course. |
| What Is Mental Health? | Mental health is defined and linked to overall health and wellbeing. |
| Reflection | Students reflect on their experiences with good, or healthy, stress. |
| Your Mental Health | The ways that choices and experiences impact mental health is introduced. |
| How Your Brain Works | Students explore the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and hippocampus and how each part contributes to their mental health. |
| Brain Functions | Students review how brain functions work together to connect thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. |
| Understanding Stress | Stress is defined and both healthy and unhealthy stress is explored. |
| What is Stress? | Students learn about good and bad stress and their effects on physical and mental health. |
| The Stress Spectrum | Stress is shown as a spectrum between healthy and unhealthy. |
| The Impact of Stress | Examples of stress experiences as they relate to the stress spectrum. |
| Key Areas of Mental Health | Students are introduced to 4 key areas of mental health: mindset, habits, relationships, and emotions. |
| Mental Health Needs | Examples from the impact of stress are revisited and the key areas of mental health are applied. |
| Reflection | Students reflect on ways they are already using to maintain mental health. |

| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| Staying Healthy | Summary of the information presented in the lesson and an introduction to the next lesson's topics. |

Lesson 2: Understanding Mental Health Challenges

Students learn the difference between mental wellness and mental illness and explore how the brain is impaired in some common disorders that affect their age group.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify warning signs of a mental health condition
- Explain how the functions of the brain affect the emotional, intellectual, and behavioral actions of a person.
- Identify when mental health is at risk.
- Identify the symptoms and possible treatments of 5 common mental illnesses affecting adolescents
- Explain how trauma impacts mental and physical health.
- Explain the ways that your environment and sudden life changes are connected to mental health.

| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| Where Do Mental Health Challenges Come From? | Mental illness is explained. Students learn that some mental health challenges are within their control and others are not, just like physical health. Students also understand the role of experiences in mental health. |
| Reflection | Students reflect on a time they weren't feeling well physically and how they knew something was wrong. |
| Brain Messages | Building off the brain information in lesson one, students discover how messages and information travels throughout the brain. |
| Types of Mental Illness | Students learn about the symptoms and treatments of five common mental health conditions: anxiety, depression, eating disorders, Post-Traumatic Stress (PTSD), and substance use abuse. |
| Diagnosis and Treatment | Information related to reaching out for help, noticing symptoms and discussing treatment with a doctor. |
| Your Environment and Experiences | Students will learn about the ways their environment's connection to mental health. |
| Traumatic Experiences | Trauma is explained in three categories, abuse, neglect and household challenges. |
| Stressors | Students explore six common stressors; loneliness, financial stress, overwhelmed by media, social media, discrimination, and social and political climate. |

| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| Extreme Thoughts, Behaviors, and Emotions | Students learn about how to recognize when thoughts, behaviors, or emotions have become extreme. |
| What Does Mental Health Mean To You? | Optional Activity: Students can watch videos in which a peer shares their mental health experience. There are four topics: Maintaining positive mental health, coping with stress, getting support for mental health, challenging experiences and mental illness. |
| Reflection | Students reflect on ways they could tell a friend is struggling with mental health. |
| You Can Adapt | Summary of the information presented in the lesson and an introduction to the next lesson's topics. |

Lesson 3: Mental Health Coping Strategies

Students learn what coping strategies are and how they can be used to deal with life's challenges and support mental health. Students also have the option to practice five coping strategies.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify emotional, intellectual, physical and social factors that can support or impact mental health.
- Explain how coping strategies can impact mental health.
- Identify appropriate coping strategies to use to best support mental health.
- Identify how self-talk can impact mental health.
- Increase awareness of effective coping strategies and ability to apply them effectively.

| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| What Are Coping Strategies? | Coping strategies are defined. |
| Reflection | Students reflect on the last time they were upset, sad or angry and what they did to feel better? |
| Thoughts, Behaviors, and Emotions | Students learn about the connection between thoughts, behaviors and emotions |
| Self-Talk | Students learn how positive and negative self-talk can impact mental health. |
| All or Nothing Thinking | Students explore a series of examples of types of negative self-talk and how to adapt it into positive self-talk. |
| Negative Thoughts | Students learn five types of negative thought patterns that can affect mental wellness: "all-or-nothing" thinking, fortune telling, catastrophizing, personalization and mental filtering. |

| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| Interrupting the Cycle | Students learn that interrupting negative cycles of thoughts, behaviors and emotions is not only possible but necessary for maintaining positive mental health. |
| Exploring Coping Strategies | Students explore coping strategies and choose which ones they would like to try. Coping strategies include: reframing thoughts, breathing mindfully, muscle relaxation techniques, journaling prompts and naming emotions. |
| Practice Coping Strategies | Optional activity: Provides an opportunity for students to try each of the coping strategies. |
| Reflection | Students reflect on the coping strategies to consider which they've tried before or would like to try in the future. |
| Building Your Coping Skills | Summary of the information presented in the lesson and an introduction to the next lesson's topics. |

Lesson 4: Staying Healthy in Times of Uncertainty

Students learn the ways that changes outside of our control impact mental health. Students will understand basic human needs, the importance of resiliency, and coping strategies specific to times of change and uncertainty.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the ways that uncertainty and change impact mental health.
- Explain the ways that your environment and sudden life changes are connected to mental health.
- Examine the ways that basic needs are connected to mental health needs and overall health.
- Compare and contrast effective coping strategies for supporting positive mental health during times of uncertainty with everyday coping strategies.
- Review the changes to thoughts, behaviors, and emotions that are common during times of uncertainty

| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| Why Is Uncertainty Challenging? | Students will learn the impact of uncertainty to mental health. |
| Reflecting on Change | Students reflect on the feeling they've experienced during a big change in their life. |
| Unexpected Life Events | Examples of unexpected life events that have an impact on mental health are reviewed. |
| COVID-19 Pandemic | The COVID-19 pandemic is provided as an example that all students, world-wide can relate to as a major time of unexpected changes. |
| Human Needs | Students are introduced to the concept of basic human needs and how they impact overall wellbeing. |

| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| Needs Pyramid | Students explore the needs pyramid to understand how they build and contribute to overall wellbeing and impact mental health. |
| Developing Resilience | Resiliency is defined and explained. Students learn how they can practice and develop their resiliency. |
| Coping During Uncertainty | Students explore the following coping strategies: Develop a routine, learn new skills, Boost your digital wellness, maintain social connections, and give and help others. Students can select from lists of items they may incorporate into their lives for each strategy. |
| Communication and Empathy | The importance of communication and empathy are explained in the context of uncertain events. Students can explore ways to interact with others during uncertain times. |
| Common Thoughts, Behaviors, and Emotions | Students review the ways their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions can be impacted by times of uncertainty. |
| Reflection | Students reflect on how they responded to an uncertain time in their life. |
| You Are Not Alone | Summary of the information presented in the lesson and an introduction to the next lesson's topics. |

Lesson 5: Seeking and Offering Support

This lesson teaches students how to recognize when help is needed and how to access it for oneself and to encourage others to seek help when needed. Stigma is addressed and how it can hinder help-seeking behaviors. Students are also provided with an approach they can use to support others.

Learning Objectives

- Identify observable and non-observable warning signs of a mental health challenges
- Identify how stigma prevents people from seeking support for mental health issues.
- List ways to combat the stigma of mental health issues.
- Understand consequences of not seeking help for mental health issues.
- List three steps to use in supporting a peer who may be struggling with a mental health condition.
- Identify treatment options for people with mental health conditions
- Identify the warning signs of self harm and suicide and steps to support others when present.

| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| When Is Help Needed? | Students learn how seeking help can positively affect someone by watching a testimonial video. |
| Reflection | Students reflect on their own ability to identify how to help a friend in need of support. |
| Observable Signs | Students learn signs that may mean that they or someone they care about is struggling with their mental health. |
| Noticing the Signs | Students prepare to review scenarios that include signs that someone may need help. This may be sensitive content for students that have experienced similar situations. |
| Noticing the Signs - A Close Friend | Students identify warning signs that a friend may need help. |
| Noticing the Signs - A Family Member | Students identify warning signs that a family member may need help. |
| Non-Observable Signs | Students learn that some mental health challenges do not always have observable warning signs. |
| Picture Perfect | An example of a social media post versus a person's full thoughts show students that what they see online is only part of someone's overall situation. |
| When to Seek Help | Students identify when they may want to take steps to seek help for themselves or others. |
| Understanding Stigma | Students learn about stigma, types of stigma and where it comes from. |
| Identifying Stigma | Students identify thoughts that stem from stigma and other ways to reframe those thoughts. |
| Practice Time | Students prepare to practice reacting to stigma in positive ways in scenario exercises. |
| Reducing Stigma | Students practice replying to a statement that stems from stigma. |
| Normalizing Challenges | Students practice replying to a statement that stems from stigma. |
| Showing Support | Students practice replying to a statement that stems from stigma. |
| Suicide and Prevention | Students learn the warning signs, risks and way to prevent suicide. |

| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| V-A-R® Method | Students learn to apply the V-A-R® Method. V-A-R®, Validate-Appreciate-Refer, is Active Minds' everyday tool for everyday conversations. More information on this can be found by visiting, activeminds.org |
| Response Options | Students apply the V-A-R® Method by sorting statements into Validate, Appreciate, and Refer categories. |
| Treatment Options | Students review options for everyday stress, feeling overwhelmed, when they're struggling and helping others. |
| Reflection | Students reflect on ways they can support or help a friend. |
| Help Is Out There | Summary of the information presented in the lesson and an introduction to the next lesson's topics. |

Lesson 6: Creating a Supportive Mental Health Plan

In this application-based lesson students are given the opportunity to practice what they've learned throughout lessons 1-5, while also developing their own personal mental wellness strategy. Students will consider what they can do during times of mental health challenges that will help them the most. Students will also practice supporting others through scenarios of mental health distress.

Learning Objectives

- Identify stigmas / myths.
- Understand signs of mental health distress.
- Identify warning signs of suicide.
- Understand how to minimize risk for mental health crises.
- Understand how to manage healthy boundaries for yourself.
- Understand available resources for support.
- Understand how to respect healthy boundaries for others.
- Apply reframing to negative self-talk.
- Apply coping strategies.
- Evaluate ways to respond to others experiencing a mental health challenge.
- Create a mental health wellness plan.

| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| Mental Health Distress | Students learn the importance of having a strategy during times of mental health distress. |
| Mental Health: Fact or Fiction | Students identify facts related to suicide prevention. |

| TOPIC | DESCRIPTION |
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| Reframe Your Self-Talk | Students review examples of negative self-talk and practice reframing thoughts in a more positive way. |
| Your Mental Health Wellness Plan | Students are introduced to the concept of a mental health wellness plan. |
| Your Warning Signs | Students review common warning signs and consider which warning signs apply to them when their mental health is at risk. |
| Your Coping Strategies | Students review common coping strategies and consider which coping strategies are most beneficial to them when they're faced with a mental health challenge. |
| Your Distractions | Students review examples of distractions and consider which distractions could be helpful to them when they're faced with a mental health challenge. |
| Your Network | Students identify the characteristics of supportive and unsupportive people when selecting who they could contact for support during a mental health challenge. |
| Supporting Others | Students learn that supporting others through a mental health challenge requires knowledge and practice, but can make a big difference in someone else's life. |
| Observing Mental Health Warning Signs | Students review examples of mental health red flags and common assumptions one can make when mental health warning signs with someone else are not obvious or immediately clear. |
| Responding to Warning Signs | Students learn that it's always best to check in and ask if others are okay when there's any concern, rather than make assumptions. |
| Stressed Out | Students practice supportive communication strategies with a family member that is dealing with extreme stress. |
| Mental Health Distress | Students practice supportive communication strategies with a friend that is experiencing mental health distress. |
| Caring for Yourself and Others | Students learn that each strategy for dealing with mental health challenges is unique and should be tailored to that person's needs. Students also learn that small consistent changes can make a big difference in their lives and the lives of others. |