

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING TOOLKIT

Best Practices to Support
STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH



Education[★]
Alliance
Business & Community for Public Schools

Acknowledgements

Social Emotional Learning Toolkit: Best Practices to Support Student Mental Health is the product of many hours of research, collaboration, and dialogue with counseling experts.

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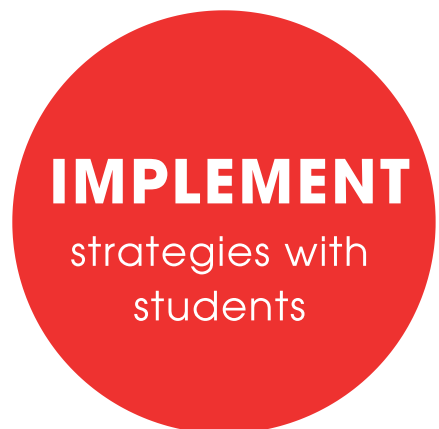
PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

The Social Emotional Learning Toolkit was developed by The Education Alliance to help AmeriCorps Mentors and other individuals working with students integrate mental health best practices and strategies into their ongoing mentoring approach.

In addition to teachers and school counselors, students often receive assistance from various school stakeholders including afterschool providers, faith-based organizations, local nonprofit agencies and more. That collective effort of caring for the social and emotional well-being of a school community brings support to students and their families when responding to trauma. This toolkit provides strategies for individuals in various settings to support student mental health.

However, it is important to know when a student needs extra support beyond mentoring. When using this toolkit you should consider the duration, frequency and intensity of concerning behaviors and immediately contact school professionals when additional support is needed.

This toolkit is organized with age-appropriate mentoring strategies. Each grade-level section includes research for the mentor to reference and consider as well as activities to implement with students.



MENTORING MATTERS

Although you may not consider yourself a mentor, in its simplest form, mentors serve as caring adult role models for students. This Toolkit is for YOU!

Education Alliance AmeriCorps Mentors use Dr. Robert Balfanz's framework to identify the most at-risk students and provide interventions and supports designed to improve attendance, behavior, and course performance. The AmeriCorps Mentor program has a history of success with 58% of the 4,302 students served over the past 6 years improving in graduation risk factors. This toolkit will help you implement a similar method for student support.

There have been substantial increases in stress and anxiety for students and adults due to the recent pandemic.

Even prior to the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that one in five children in the U.S. currently have, or at some stage have had, a debilitating mental illness. There is little doubt that these struggles lead to poor academic achievement by students and decreased graduation rates. Addressing social emotional learning is foundational to academic learning.

Mentors often serve on the frontline of these realities, working with educators and school counselors in the current COVID-19 crisis and beyond to support learning and meet students' mental-health needs.





GRADES PRE-K-2

Very young children are not immune to mental health challenges and the after effects of traumatic experiences.

In the presence of very young children, adults sometimes feel the need to step in and address mental health challenges that young children often face. However, children often have within themselves the resilience and insight to move through an array of challenges when allowed to do so with the support of a caring, encouraging adult. Additionally, rushing children to resolve their mental health struggles is often unsuccessful.

Best practices for interventions with young children, ages PreK-2 recognize that play is the language of this developmental level, and toys are their words (Landreth, 2012). Therefore, supporting young children during mental health issues and trauma recovery should involve:

- 1 Allowing for ample opportunities for free play**
- 2 Developing a caring relationship with at least one caring, safe adult who will not judge a child's thoughts, feelings, comments, or struggles**
- 3 Offering a variety of play materials and toys that allow for a broad range of emotional and creative expression (e.g., arts and crafts materials, toys that allow for the expression of anger and frustration, toys that represent nurturing behaviors, and toys that allow children to show fear such as scary toys like sharks and dinosaurs) (Dickinson & Kottman, 2019; Landreth, 2012)**
- 4 Providing a safe play space and environment free of judgement in which children can explore and express feelings**

Note that this Toolkit does not encourage or support the idea that all adults are qualified or required to serve in the role of a play therapist or counselor; that role requires years of professional training and education. What adults who serve in mentoring roles for young children can do is provide the patience, safety, and the respect for the developmental level of the child that allows children to access their own inner strengths.

Many readers desire strategies on how to initiate the kind of play and engagement to which we are referring. Below we offer ideas and strategies which most adults can employ to encourage safe play and discussion around the challenges that young children experience.



SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

GRADES PRE-K-2

BIBLIOTHERAPY - USE OF BOOKS

Learn

The use of reading to produce effective change and promote personal growth and development is often referred to as bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is also known as a process that attempts to help young people understand themselves and cope with problems by providing literature relevant to their personal situations and developmental needs. There are two distinct kinds of bibliotherapy: clinical and developmental. Clinical bibliotherapy involves psychotherapeutic methods used by skilled practitioners with individuals experiencing serious emotional problems (counselors and psychologists in individual and group counseling). Developmental bibliotherapy involves helping children navigate their normal health and development (teacher and classroom use). Most mentors and readers of this toolkit can successfully use developmental bibliotherapy to approach otherwise difficult conversations with young children.

Consider

Why use books with children who struggle with anxiety, depression, grief, and other social issues?

- Good stories (books) can promote healing among children who have experienced trauma or who are having behavioral and emotional difficulties.
- Children naturally enjoy stories and being read to.
- Stories allow children to read about others who have overcome problems similar to their own and they can then apply what they learn in counseling to their own story.
- Children do not have to “own” their problems when given the chance to see them played out in story.
- Stories make the ideas presented more memorable.
- Stories stimulate the ability to find solutions to tough problems and to access the resources within the child’s unconscious.
- Stories teach new attitudes and belief systems to children who have learned to believe that they are not worthwhile or who have learned an inappropriate way of coping.
- The process of reading to the child is a wonderful way to build rapport that is essential to the healing process.
- Stories allow children to identify with and project their problems onto the characters; therefore, allowing the child to maintain a feeling of safety.

Bottom line; when adults do not know what else to do to support a child in their mental health struggle, consider reading with them!

Implement

General rules for engaging in developmental bibliotherapy include:

1. Don’t just read for speed! Read slowly and take time to add discussion about what is being read.
2. Ask the child what they think the character(s) in the book will do to solve their issue.
3. Allow the child to choose to co-read the book or simply have the adult serve as primary reader. Remember, this is not necessarily an exercise in improving literacy; the important thing is that the child hears and engages in the story.

Consider adding the Children books suggested here to your personal library. The Toolkit provides a very brief list here and note that there are many wonderful children's books with great, empowering messages.

BOOKS

About Acceptance:

- Hair Love; Matthew A. Cherry

About Resilience:

- Salt in His Shoes; Deloris Jordan
- The Girl who Never Made Mistakes; Mark Pett & Gary Rubinstein
- Brave Irene; William Steig
- Unstoppable Me!; Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

That offer Calming Strategies:

- Wemberly Worried; Kevin Henkes
- I Can Handle It!; Laurie Wright

About Managing Emotions:

- Llama Llama Mad at Mama; Anna Dewdney
- The Grouchy Ladybug; Eric Carle

About Anxiety:

- Wilma Jean the Worry Machine; Julia Cook

That deal with Grief:

- When Dinosaurs Die; Laurie Krasny Brown
- Bear’s Last Journey; Udo Weigelt
- A Story for Hippo; Simon Puttock
- The Invisible String; Patrice Karst

About parental incarceration:

- Missing Daddy; Mariame Kaba



ART & DRAWING

Learn

The former President of the Association for Play Therapy, Dr. Joanna White, was once asked the question, “If you could only have one play material or toy, what would you have readily available for young children?” Her answer was “art materials.” While it is always best to allow children to create art at their own pace and based on what they want to create, some adults may find it helpful to give thought to directing children who are somewhat reluctant to draw or paint. In that case, there are common drawings that can be used to connect to a child’s world and prompt them to share their feelings and emotions.

Consider

While many adults may be inclined to draw and create alongside the child, the Toolkit recommends refraining from that. Instead, consider taking this time to focus on the child and be attentive to the child in a safe, non-threatening space.

Implement

Adults who direct young children to draw should consider following some general guidelines that will allow the child the freedom to decide how and what they draw:

1. Offer a wide variety of drawing/painting materials (e.g., colored pencils, markers, crayons, etc.) and use paper that is unlined and provides ample space for the child to draw. Ask the child to “draw a person;” the person can be any gender, any age, any person they choose.
2. Ask the child to “draw their family;” there is no expectation that the child draws any or every member of their family. You want to get a sense of who the child identifies is in their family.
3. Ask the child to “draw where you live;” this is very different from asking the child to “draw your house.” Allow the child the freedom to interpret “where they live” according to their world. This is especially important for children during a family restructuring like a divorce. The resulting drawing is often fascinating.
4. Refrain from answering questions as the child draws. Use reflective statements to answer any questions. Statements such as, “ you can draw it anyway you like,” “you can choose any color you like, that is up to you,” and “you really want to know if I like your picture; you have worked really hard on that picture” are all appropriate response in that they do not direct the child to alter their drawings based on the adult’s responses.
5. Finally, when the child appears to have completed their process, always ask if they would like to talk about what they drew. Perhaps they would like to tell a story about their work. The child should never be forced to do either, but prompting the opportunity is a best practice.



GARDEN YOGA FOR KIDS

Learn

Mindfulness practices help develop skills needed for self-regulation; a skill that many young children lack. Yoga and mindfulness have been known to improve both physical and mental health, while also improving self-esteem, focus, and classroom behaviors for children. Garden Yoga for Kids can be used to teach relaxation and mindfulness at an early age. Each of these yoga poses helps the child focus on the present moment by practicing this activity. Other benefits may include increased body awareness, as well as strength and flexibility. It is important for children to improve in these areas, at an early age, to help them succeed in school, and other areas of their lives.



Pretend to be a tree

Tree Pose: Stand on one leg. Bend the other knee and place the sole of your foot on your inner thigh. Sway like a tree in the breeze. Now the other side.



Pretend to be a frog

Squat Pose: Come down to a squat with your knees apart and arms resting between your knees. Touch your hands to the ground. Jump like a frog.



Pretend to be a seed

Child's Pose: Sit back on your heels and bring your forehead down to rest on the floor. Pretend to be a seed in the garden.



Pretend to be a butterfly

Cobbler's Pose: Sit on your buttocks with a tall spine. Bend your legs with the soles of your feet together. Flap your legs like the wings of a butterfly.



Pretend to be a flower

Flower Pose: Lift your bent legs, balancing on your sitting bones. Weave your arms under your legs, palms up. Pretend to be a flower in bloom.



Consider

Many adults may be reluctant to engage in Garden Yoga because they do not practice yoga themselves. The movements in Garden Yoga do not require previous experience in the practice of yoga. Adults need only review the poses prior to introducing them to the child/children and consider practicing them ahead of time.

Implement

There are no steadfast and firm “rules” for the use of Garden Yoga with children. In general, the following instructions apply:

- Approach the activity with the idea that play is the language of children. In other words, do not become frustrated if the child is not completely focused on holding poses.
- Find a quiet place (inside or outside) to practice.
- Read the name of the yoga pose to the students, and then instruct them how to practice the pose, according to the poster.
- Consider holding the pose only as long as the child/children’s developmental level permits; don’t expect very young children to hold poses for over a minute. Start poses with holds around 30 seconds or so and work up for older children.



SLOW DOWN & CALM DOWN

Learn

The Slow Down and Calm Down strategy is useful to anyone learning to regulate their emotions. During times of stress, it can be difficult for children to think about strategies to help them calm down. Slow Down & Calm Down is simple and easy to implement. By practicing simple calming strategies regularly, children learn to regulate their emotions when needed. Regulating emotions is another important skill for children to learn about at an early age and develop as they grow and mature.

Stay Grounded Using Your 5 Senses

Relax Your Body, Take a Few Deep Breaths and Focus on the Following...

5 Things You Can See 

4 Things You Can Feel 

3 Things You Can Hear 

2 Things You Can Smell 

1 Thing You Can Taste 

Consider

It is important for the adult who uses the Slow Down & Calm Down strategy with young children to exhibit patience and a calm demeanor when attempting to help a child in distress. Encourage the child to focus on your voice and approach the strategy as a game or something fun to try! Remember, with young children, framing mental health interventions as play is important.

Also, be sure to allow ample time in between the 5,4,3,2,1 thing(s) the child names. Don't rush the process!

Implement

While no steadfast "rules" apply to the Slow Down & Calm Down strategy, adults can generally follow the statements below:

Let's play this game that I learned to help me calm myself when I feel angry or upset. Let's start by taking 3 slow, deep belly breaths. Now...

- Name 5 things you can see.
- Name 4 things you can feel.
- Name 3 things you can hear.
- Name 2 things you can smell.
- Name 1 thing you can taste.

Then, considering completing this grounding technique by asking the student to:

- Say something (1 thing) positive about yourself.

And then wrap up with:

- Take 3 more, slow, deep belly breaths.



GRADES 3-5

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Intervention (CDC), as well as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Disorders (DSM-5; APA, 2013), anxiety is by far the most common mental health disorder in the United States. This is true for adults as well as children and adolescents (Luke & Schimmel, in press). As a result, those who work daily with children will see anxiety manifest itself in a variety of ways; anxiety can look like depression, anger, apathy, and even excitability. In other words, many mental health concerns often find themselves rooted in generalized anxiety. Unfortunately, it is likely that many of the mental health challenges student experience will persist over the next several years as a direct result of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and the simultaneous experiences of racial unrest (Springer, Schimmel, & Ieva, in press).

To support students in grades 3-5, educators can explore use of the strategies listed in this section of the tool kit while employing these best practice guidelines:

- 1 Always approach any activity or discussion with a child regarding their mental health challenge with an open mind.**
- 2 Never judge a child based on their mental health struggles.**
- 3 Engage in discussion about mental health challenges with an empathic ear and reject the feeling of need to “fix” it for a child; just be with them and LISTEN!**



SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

GRADES 3-5

POSITIVE SELF-TALK SHIELD

Learn

This activity helps students learn to pay more attention to their self-talk. By becoming more aware of their self-talk, it can increase their self-confidence, motivation, enhance their performance and overall well-being. The shield provides protection from negative comments, name calling, and putdowns. The shield can be very effective with children who are experiencing problems with their parents, peers, or with bullying.

Evidence has shown that the conversations we have in our heads can have a big impact on our emotions, our view of ourselves, and our actions. By using more positive self-talk, you are more likely to build confidence and self-esteem, feel more in control of events in your life, and achieve your goals.

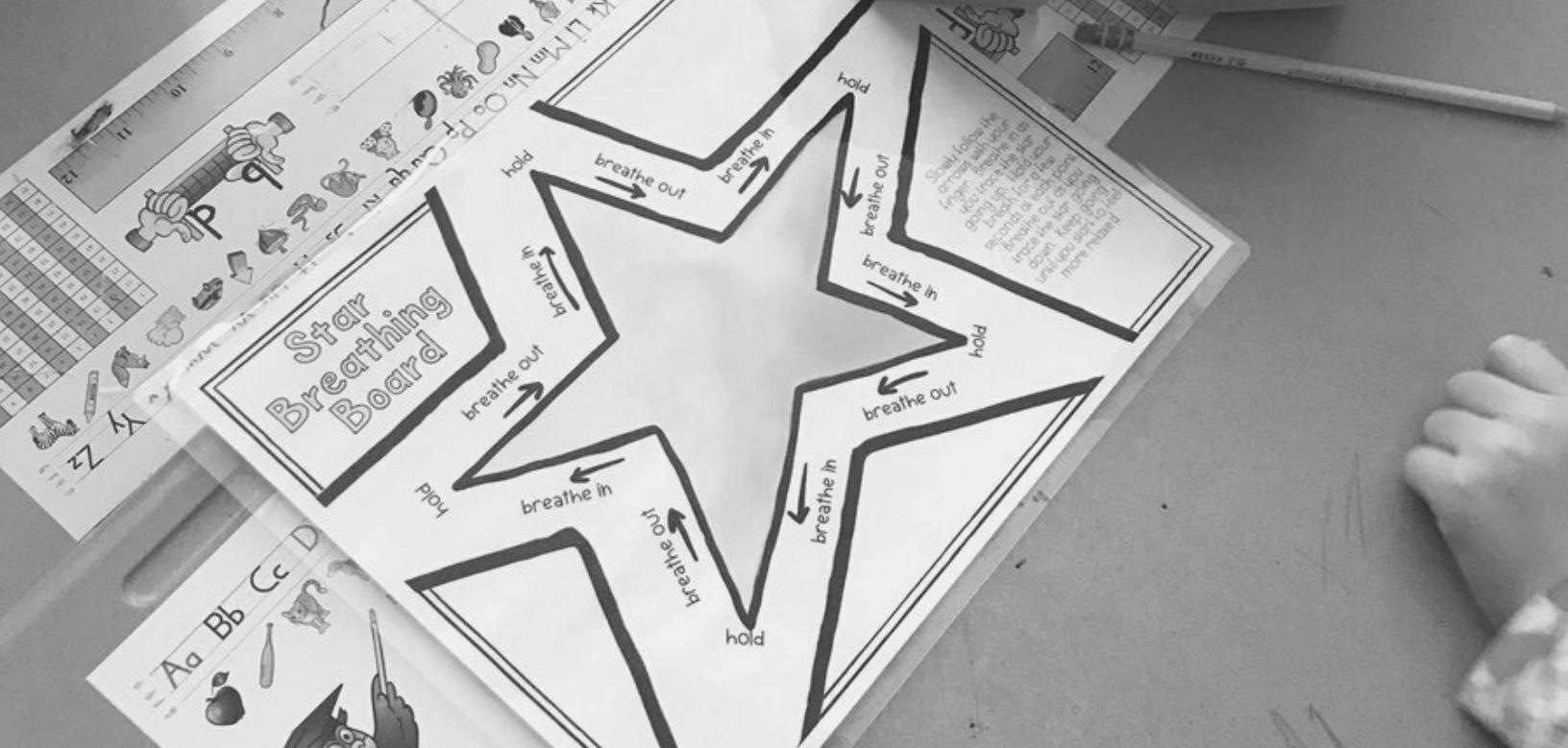
Consider

Shield provides protection from negative comments, name calling, and putdowns (Vernon, 2019). The shield can be very effective with children who are discussing problems with their parents or with bullying (Jacobs & Schimmel, 2013). A shield can be used to dramatize the effects of protecting oneself from the attacks.

Implement

Provide students with a shield worksheet or ask them to draw a shield. Provide students with the following instructions:

- Develop and write down statements you can practice saying to protect yourself against negative thoughts. Oftentimes writing facts about the troubling situation or positive affirmations can help!
- Decorate your shield and place it somewhere visible.



STAR BREATHING BOARD

Learn

This activity can be used to help students cope with many different emotions and is a great tool to have on hand when teaching students how to breathe.

Consider

Deep breathing helps get more oxygen into the bloodstream, opening up capillaries. This has a physical effect on the body to help calm down and lower stress.



Implement

- Start at any “Breathe In” side of the star.
- Trace your finger over the “Breathe In” side of the point.
- Hold your breath when your finger gets to the tip of the point.
- Breathe out as you trace your finger over the other side of the point.
- Keep going until you reach where you started.
- When you trace the whole star, you will have completed 5 deep breaths.
- Repeat as much as needed.



ZONES OF REGULATION



Learn

This chart helps students identify how they are feeling in a given moment given their emotions and level of alertness as well as guide them towards a healthy coping strategy. Identifying “Zones of Regulation” helps students learn improved emotional control, sensory regulation, self-awareness, and problem-solving abilities. This visual also teaches students how to use calming techniques, cognitive strategies, and sensory supports to stay in a zone or move from one zone to another.

Consider

Students that struggle with self-regulation can benefit from this chart.

| Blue | Green | Yellow | Red |
|--|--|--|---|
| Sick Sad Tired Bored Moving Slowly | Happy Calm Feeling Okay Focused Ready to Learn | Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control | Mad/Angry Mean Yelling/Hitting Disgusted Out of Control |

Implement

What can I do?

| Blue | Green | Yellow | Red |
|--|---|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ask for a hug.2. Put my head down on the desk.3. Think about something fun. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Keep up the good work, you're doing great!2. Starting to feel yellow? Talk to your teacher! | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Talk to a teacher.2. Go to a calm place.3. Squeeze a stress ball.4. Take deep breaths. | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Relax my muscles.2. Read a book.3. Take deep breaths.4. Drink some water. |



WORRY JOURNAL/WORRY TIME

Learn

Stone and Brott (2019) recommend interventions such as bibliotherapy, journaling, and maintaining a thought diary with children and adolescents struggling with anxiety. These activities incorporate concepts from CBT (examining thoughts and associated feelings) as well as mindfulness (journaling and keeping a thought diary encourage reflecting on experiences and situations where anxiety was most prevalent) (Luke & Schimmel, in press).

When using the “Worry Journal” in combination with “Worry Time,” students are encouraged to select a designated time each day or week to simply sit and think about their worry. During this time, they journal any thoughts, feelings, or behaviors they recall experiencing during recent times of worry and feeling anxious.

Consider

Students are encouraged to engage in this exercise with no judgement; that is, there are not “right” or “wrong” ways to journal. Students should be allowed the freedom to journal with zero judgment by any adult. The “Worry Journal” and “Worry Time” can be used in conjunction with the activities in Figure 1.1 below.

Implement

Figure 1.1: Tools to Manage Anxiety





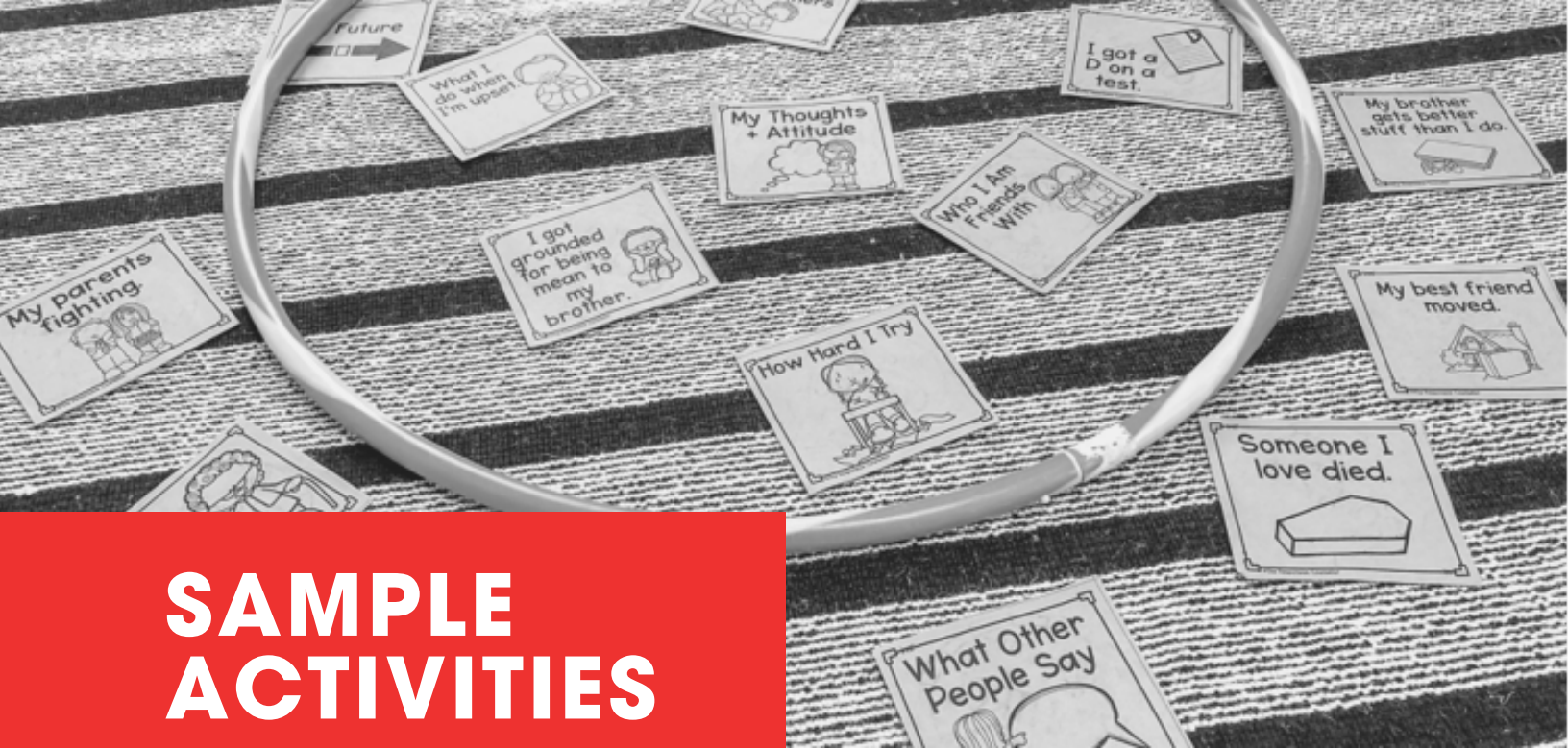
GRADES 6-8

The time from age 11 until around the age of 14 is often referred to as early adolescence. This is the time when most children are entering traditional middle school through approximately the 8th grade. This time is often a very difficult one for even the most well-adjusted young person. The addition of mental health challenges only magnifies this already challenging time.

It is during the middle school years when young adolescents begin to search for their individual identity and begin to push back against parents. They also feel a greater sense of loyalty to their peers all at a time when their self-esteem declines as they experience a variety of physical and psychological changes. It is during this time when bullying increases. This can lead to a myriad of negative mental health, social, and academic outcomes (Vernon, 2019).

To support students in grades 6-8, educators can explore use of the strategies listed in this section of the tool kit while employing these best practice guidelines:

- 1 Recognize that young adolescents are undergoing a big cognitive shift and are transitioning from concrete to formal operations. Adults who work with adolescents may need to be very intentional in making connections between the activity and how the child can use it in their day to day life (i.e., the child may see how their friends can use Circles of Control (next page) to lower their stress, but not be able to see how they, themselves, can use it).**
- 2 Recognize that peer acceptance and peer relationships are much more important to the early adolescent than adult connections. Refrain from getting frustrated with the child who values their friend's opinion more than yours!**
- 3 Expect the early adolescent to test you; do not be surprised by the telling of stories that seemingly have shocking details or contain strong language. This is often a test to see if you are someone who can be trusted and if you are serious when you say that you are willing to have serious conversations with them. Refrain from showing your awe and surprise and think deeply before handing out punishment for such a test (Springer, Peterson, Moss, & Vernon, 2019).**



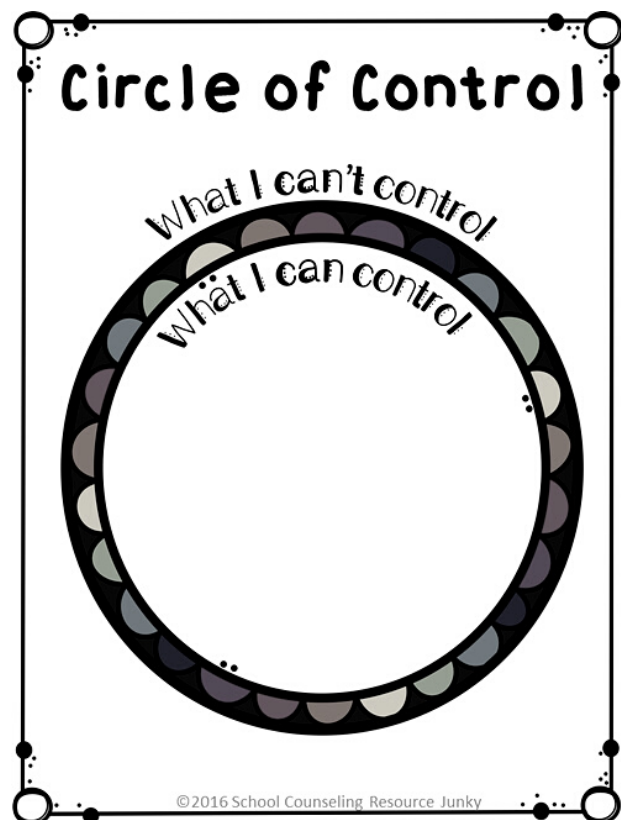
SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

GRADES 6-8

CIRCLES OF CONTROL ACTIVITY

Learn

Early adolescents often experience anxiety and stress over events for which they have no control. At the same time, they experience a lack of awareness of the things in their lives they actually can control. Circles of Control is an activity to help students with anxiety, self-control, anger, and accepting personal responsibility. This activity helps students visualize what they can and cannot control in their environment. By learning to focus on what is in their control, students can cope with emotions of anxiety, anger, and stress.



Consider

Prior to engaging an adolescent in Circles of Control, consider completing the activity for yourself. Have you given thought to what you, personally, are in control of in your life? Giving thought to how the activity applies in your own life will help you discuss various controllable aspects of the adolescent's life. Also, don't fail to recognize that an adolescent has control of less factors in their life than an adult does in their life.

Implement

Given the value that early adolescents place on peer relationships and their friends' opinions, consider conducting Circles of Control in small groups of 3 or 4 children. Hand each of them the activity page below (or one similar) and then provide the following, general directives:

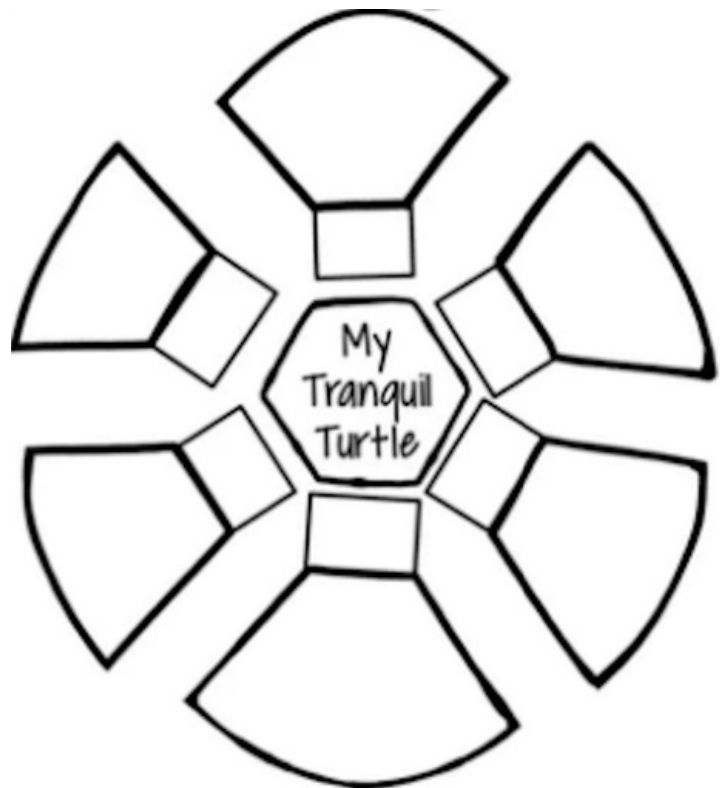
- Help students identify what they can and cannot control and make a list.
- Students will write or draw inside of the circle, the things they can control.
- Students will write or draw outside of the circle, the things they cannot control.
- Discuss with the students what they can control and how this will help them.
- Discuss with the students where they might place this circle of control, so they can look at it often, as a reminder.



MY TRANQUIL TURTLE

Learn

Mindfulness and coping strategies help students with stress reduction, improved attention, and improved relationships with others. My Tranquil Turtle is great for students who are just learning about mindfulness and coping strategies! Because of the increased importance of peer-relationships, it is important to help students learn how to increase the skills to improve their relationships with others. Practicing mindfulness and learning new coping strategies helps students learn how to regulate their emotions on their own and deal with difficult situations.



Consider

Ahead of engaging in My Tranquil Turtle, spend some time giving thought to the role that mindfulness plays in your own life; this may come up when you discuss it with students and you want to be prepared for the discussion! How do you calm yourself? What do you do to stay mindful and present? How do you handle moments of extreme stress, anxiety, and low self-confidence?

Implement

Begin the activity by asking the student(s) if they have ever heard of the term “mindfulness.” Then, help them come to an understanding of what it means to be mindful. Next, ask the student(s) why, if discussing being mindful, it might make sense to use a turtle to represent being calm and thoughtful (i.e., turtles have to think carefully about where they want to go and how long it will take to get there, turtles never move quickly, turtles react quickly, etc.). After this discussion, provide the following prompts:

- Make sure each student has a copy of a blank My Tranquil Turtle template.
- Discuss mindfulness techniques they may enjoy doing, such as taking deep breaths, journaling about their feelings, exercising, relaxing or stretching their muscles, or going to a place where they enjoy spending time.
- Ask students to come up with their favorite techniques and write them on each part of the turtle’s shell.
- If done in small groups, allow time for students to share ideas that they may not have thought of, but that their peers did think of.
- Wrap up with a discussion of a good place to keep their Tranquil Turtle so that they can look at it often, as a reminder.



PLAN OF ACTION

Learn

Helping early adolescents strategize about how to destress and handle difficult mental health challenges is a valuable activity in which to engage. Plan of Action is one activity that can guide mentors and teachers through the process of developing such strategies.



Consider

Like other activities throughout this tool kit, allowing early adolescents to work on their Plan of Action in small groups is valuable. In small groups, adolescents learn from each other (imparting information), increase their awareness that peers struggle in very similar ways (universality), and can hear how others have successfully navigated similar issues (instilling hope) (Ballinger & Yalom, 1995).

Implement

Mentors and teachers should feel permission to engage in a Plan of Action without following many hard and steadfast rules. Here are a few tips that adults may find helpful to initiate the intervention:

1. Sit in a quiet place with either a single early adolescent or a small group of 3-5 adolescents who are familiar with one another.
2. Introduce the graphic provided below and share how we all have times where we feel down or even stressed. Emphasize that this is normal and allow all of the adolescents to share times when they have felt down or stressed. The adult leading the activity should consider sharing a time or two they have felt the same way.
3. Provide each participant with their own copy of the Plan of Action graphic. Discuss how having activities for each of these 5 categories can help us cope when we feel down or stressed.
4. Instruct the participants to begin to think of ways that they can be positive, be realistic, and how they can begin to take action to deal with feelings. Also encourage them to begin thinking of a person they can call or reach out to when times are tough.
5. Next, allow the participant(s) to choose which category they would like to work on and discuss first. Then, work to help each participant develop the number of ideas/strategies with which they feel comfortable (some students may be fine with only one idea, other students may want to make a list for each "finger").
6. Move through each of the 5 "fingers" allowing participant(s) to share ideas, share times when strategies worked for them, and ensure that each person leaves with a solid Plan of Action!



GRADES 9-12

According to the CDC, the absence of a diagnosable mental health condition does not necessarily mean that school-aged students are not struggling with mental health issues. While as many as 4.4 million children (ages 3-17) are diagnosed with anxiety and 1.9 million children (ages 3-17) are diagnosed with depression, this number may not represent the actual number which could be much higher of children and adolescents that struggle with the effects of mental health issues such as these (CDC, 2020).

Adults who work with children in grades 9-12 are susceptible to a common mistake when working with this age group; that is, they often assume that the adolescent's developmental maturity matches their physical maturity. Many adolescents appear grown up and mature because they are physically developed. Make no mistake, adolescents, even those who are physically well developed, are not miniature adults. Therefore, they often lack the same language, emotional expression, mentalizing, rationalizing, and cognitive frameworks that an adult might use in working through mental health challenges. Expecting them to do so is not only unfair, but it can lead to frustration for both the adolescent and the adult (Luke & Schimmel, In press).

To support students in grades 9-12, educators can explore use of the strategies listed in this section of the tool kit while employing these best practice guidelines:

- 1 Do your best to view the adolescent from their perspective; they benefit from knowing that you are doing your best to “get them.”**
- 2 Avoid forcing any activities or strategies on to adolescents; instead, honor the adolescent's autonomy and resist driving a wedge between you and them.**
- 3 Ask, investigate, and honor the adolescent's strengths and work with them to find activities and strategies that have worked for them in the past and that engage their interests and abilities (e.g. don't encourage a teen who doesn't like or enjoy writing to journal or keep a diary). (Springer, Peterson, Moss, & Vernon, 2019).**

H-UNGRY
A-NGRY
L-ONLY
T-RED
O TO HALT

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

GRADES 9-12

HALT

Learn

Do you recall how old you first were when you realized that when you allowed yourself to get hungry, you were not able to function at a high level? When did you realize that when your body needs fuel, you don't process events, or problem solve, as well as you do when you have taken the time to eat? Chances are, you did not possess this level of self-awareness until you were well beyond high school. Not only does hunger impact our ability to function at a high level, but exhaustion, anger, and feelings of loneliness also impact us.

Consider intentionally teaching adolescents the impact of being Hungry, Angry, Lonely, and Tired on their mental health!

Consider

The internet is full of graphics you can access and use to post in classrooms and offices to remind students to attend to their basic needs.

Implement

There is no wrong way to introduce this concept to adolescents. Consider starting with sharing your own experiences of allowing yourself to get hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. Next, open discussions with teens about how they can begin to be aware of these feelings within them. Engage in discussions (see potential discussion questions below) regarding how students can begin to ask for help when they recognize that they are hungry, angry, lonely, or tired.

Finally, while avoiding the urge to fix mental health challenges for adolescents is advisable, adults can help adolescents mitigate their struggle to deal with anxiety, focus and attention issues, and anger by understanding how hunger and exhaustion contribute to those issues. Then, adults can do two simple things:

1. Have healthy, nutritious snacks on hand for adolescents who need them
2. Increase understanding for teens who are tired and consider allowing teens to “step away” from work or class for a brief time of rest or meditation.

Discussion Questions for HALT:

H- Hungry:

What is your favorite food to eat and who could you enjoy a meal with?
Who is a person you could go to when you need help with food?

A- Angry:

Who is someone you could talk with when you are feeling angry?
What healthy activity could you do to help release this feeling of anger?
What has worked for you in the past to reduce angry feelings?

L- Lonely:

Who is someone you could spend time with?
What is your favorite TV show to watch or book to read?
What are some other activities you enjoy doing in your free time that you could possibly do with someone or even alone?

T- Tired:

Where is your favorite place to relax?
How many hours of sleep are you getting each night? Is that enough?
What do you do when you cannot sleep? Is that a good strategy?
How could you get more sleep?



2 X 10 (TWO - BY - TEN)

Learn

Adolescents in the throes of mental health challenges often show great resilience and possess the ability to cope in the presence of adults who show compassion and patience. One concept shown to bolster resilience and increase the ability to cope with trauma is referred to as protective factors. Common protective factors include school achievement, a sense of community, and the ability to demonstrate grit. However, the easiest protective factor to support for most adolescents is the concept of “proactive parenting,” or the idea that adolescents who have at least one warm, caring adult who provides limits and boundaries enhances resilience (Leppma & Schimmel, 2019).

A strategy that allows for this caring relationship to develop is referred to as the 2 X 10 strategy.

Consider

Review the following videos for ideas on implementing the 2 X 10 intervention:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRXkCaZdp8E>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctscsVQEiqE>

Implement

While there are no steadfast rules for implementing the 2 x 10 strategy, consider observing some general rules for the intervention:

- Avoid academic topics; students are allowed to talk about anything they choose
- Start small by picking one or two teens; it is unrealistic that you can implement this with every adolescent who can benefit
- Use open ended questions; avoid questions that simply require a yes/no response
- Smile, be persistent, warm, and primarily, listen!



SELF-CARE: CREATE YOUR OWN PLAN

Learn

Self-Care encourages individuals to maintain a healthy relationship with themselves to help produce positive feelings and boost self-esteem and self-confidence. Self-Care means taking care of your mental health, in addition to your physical health. Participation in self-care strategies, helps to reduce or eliminate anxiety and depression, aids in stress reduction, improves concentration, minimizes frustration and anger, increases happiness, and improves energy. There are many self-care strategies to choose from, and the activities can be done in a variety of locations. Some tips to improve self-care may include paying attention to your physical health, getting enough sleep, fueling your body with healthy food, identifying things that matter to you, and changing your mindset, at times.

Consider

Adolescents can easily equate self-care with activities that, in reality, are not necessarily healthy. As you work with adolescents to develop self-care plans, try to steer them away from binge watching television, overindulging in activities that involve screens such as phone time and video games, and stress that drinking and drug use is, in fact, not a healthy behavior!

Implement

Take some time to think about things you enjoy mentally, physically and emotionally. Some mental self-care activities may include reading, talking to friends, or watching a movie. Physical self-care activities may include going for a walk outside, exercising, eating healthy foods, or implementing a skin care routine. Emotional self-care activities may include taking a hot bath, helping others, drawing, writing, or creating something new.





THE TEENAGE BRAIN EXPLAINED VIDEO

Learn

Helping adolescents understand how they develop both physically and mentally can encourage open and productive conversations about the challenges they face. The Teenage Brain Explained, produced by the SciShow, is a tool adults can use to open conversation about how teens' brains grow, develop, and need rest and engagement to thrive.

The video can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiduiTq1ei8>

Consider

Consider showing The Teenage Brain Explained in small groups of teens to encourage discussion and thoughts about the struggles teens encounter as they grow and develop.

Implement

K-W-L is an acronym that stands for "Know," "Want to Know," and "Learned." The KWL chart is divided into three columns for students to answer:

- What they already know
- What they want to know
- What they learned

KWL charts are often used in school for reading assignments, but they can be useful in mentoring to help motivate and engage mentees in a learning process and present a simple method for organizing notetaking.

Begin by asking the student to fill out the "K" on the KWL Chart....

- Ask students, "What do you think you already know about how your brain develops and changes and is effected by your choice of activities?"
- Allow students ample time to complete the "K" on the chart.
- Next, ask students, "What do you Want to know about how your brain grows, changes, and develops over time?"
- Allow students ample time to complete the "W" on the chart.

Now it is time to show the SciShow Video!

After showing the video, ask students, "What did you Learn about your brain from the video? Take some time and fill in that "L" section on your chart."

After students have completed the K-W-L chart, open the floor for discussion of their lists.

Finally, expect young teens to have questions listed in the "L" section of their charts that you do not know the answer to. Don't just make it up! Feel confident responding with statements like, "I don't know the answer to that, but I can try to find out!" and "That is a great question that I would like to know the answer to also - let me check that out!"

| | | | |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------|
| TOPIC | | | Name: _____ |
| | | | Date: _____ |
| KNOW | WANT TO KNOW | LEARNED | |
| | | | |



USE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR MINDFULNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Learn

The ability to regulate emotions is critical for improving mental health. One proven strategy for improving emotional regulation is to engage in mindfulness and mindfulness practices (e.g. yoga, meditation, relaxation, etc.) (Poteck, 2012). The following applications can be downloaded on a smart-device and can be used daily to help practice and increase mindfulness. When exploring these, there may be certain areas or tools that are more useful for different adolescents, depending on what they are hoping to gain from improving mindfulness. Overall, these applications can help decrease stress, improve attention span, and improve social relationships.

Consider

Many adolescents may find that their screen time is restricted by parents and caregivers. Consider opening a line of communication with caregivers explaining the appropriate use of devices to engage in using apps such as the ones listed to improve mental health. When parents and caregivers assume students in their care are on phones and tablets constantly scrolling Snap Chat, TikTok or social media, they rightfully step in and begin to limit overall usage. Develop a handout for caregivers discussing the apps that students are using and why you, and the student(s), chose those particular apps. Include ideas for use as a family, provide a general overview of what the app does, and consider sharing why you use the app!

Implement

Headspace (Meditation and Mindfulness)

<https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app>

Calm (Meditation)

<https://www.calm.com/>

MyLife (Meditation and Mindfulness)

<https://my.life/>

Unique Daily Affirmations

<https://www.uniquedailyaffirmations.com>

Motivation- Daily Quotes

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/motivation-daily-quotes/id876080126>

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