



Mental Health & Wellness



Teacher's Guide (for Grades 4-6)

CLASS ACTIVITIES

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Introduction

PURPOSE

At YouthSpeak, our vision is to inspire and empower youth to live resilient and meaningful lives. Our mission is to assist youth facing challenges through leadership training and empowering them by sharing personal stories in order to promote mental health, well-being, empathy, and hope in assemblies and workshops. We aim to make sure no child or youth feels alone, and those who are struggling with mental health or challenges are connected to available support tools to improve their overall well-being.

The purpose of this teacher guide is to provide valuable and easy-to-follow awareness-building activities. This teacher's guide is a resource that teachers can use in their classrooms with their students. The activities in this teacher guide are exclusively for the Junior divisions but may be modified for your unique classroom.

HOW TO USE

This teacher guide has seven activities that are designed to support mental health and wellness. They can be used in the classroom to help students understand and explore important topics such as self-care and coping skills from a young age. Each activity has an estimated time frame and a material list at the top of the page. The specific steps on how to run the activity are under it. There are also virtual alternatives for each activity so you can use these activities in your online teaching as well. Teachers do not need to follow every step for each activity and can revise the steps to suit their unique classroom.

SAFE SPACE

Please remind students that the classroom is a safe space and encourage them to have open discussions about mental health and wellness. Discussing these topics can bring up strong thoughts and feelings, and it is important to let them know that if students are experiencing any difficult feelings and need help, that the teachers, administration, and other caring adults are always there to listen and support them.

1. Brilliant Brainstorm

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 4 to 6

TIME: 10-15 minutes

MATERIALS: Blackboard/ whiteboard/ chart paper

DELIVERY: This activity can be completed both in class, and virtually over google meets.

OBJECTIVE

To brainstorm with students what Mental Wellness means to them. By the end of this activity, students will be familiar with the multiple ways to promote positive mental health.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Initiate a whole class discussion on what mental health is, by using the suggested brainstorming prompts.

Prompts:

a. What comes to mind when you hear "Mental Health?"

What does positive mental health look like to you?

b. What do you do when you feel stressed? Anxious? Sad? Upset?

c. How can you work towards having positive mental health?

2. Arrange students into small groups of 5-6 in the classroom/small breakout rooms. In their small groups, have students come up with positive coping mechanisms and how to maintain positive mental health. Examples: physical activity, arts and crafts, listening to music, playing an instrument, yoga, meditation, deep breathing, and talking to someone you trust.

3. Have the groups brainstorm their ideas on a piece of chart paper with illustrations/on a google doc or slide that can be worked on collaboratively and shared with the rest of the class afterwards.

4. Have students present their ideas to the class. A follow-up class discussion can also be initiated. Optional: Chart papers can be placed around the classroom.

2. Crumpled Character

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 4 to 6

TIME: 10-15 minutes

MATERIALS: Large piece of chart/construction paper, markers

OBJECTIVE

To explore how words and actions can have consequences and can be damaging to someone's self-esteem, self-confidence, and body image. These words and actions can never be taken back, and it shows how bullying leaves a lasting impact.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Put students into groups and have them draw and name a character on a large piece of chart/construction paper.
2. Each student in the group will have a turn to crumple a part of the paper and to write something negative or mean to the character.
3. Once every student has had the chance to crumple a part of the paper, ask each group to try and flatten out the paper back to its original form (paper will remain wrinkled).
4. Engage the students in a class discussion asking the following questions:
 - a. What did you notice about the paper?
 - b. Are the wrinkles coming out?
 - c. What do you think this represents?
 - d. How do your actions and words affect others?

- e. How can they be damaging?
5. Discuss with students that even though the paper is crumpled, the character is still a valuable person. However, the mean words and actions have long-term effects on them. Mention the importance of being kind to others.

MODIFIED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS

1. On a google slide, use clipart or images from a website, such as Canva, to create an anonymous character portrait. Share this google slide with all of the students by making it accessible, and then screen share the image.
2. Have each student edit the google slide by writing something negative or mean to the character by typing it into a text box and placing it over the image.
3. Once every student has had the chance to write something mean or negative to the character, print the picture and crumple it into a ball, while showing the students. Next, try to flatten out the paper back to its original form (paper will remain wrinkled).
4. Engage the students in a class discussion asking the following questions:
 - a. What did you notice about the paper?
 - b. Are the wrinkles coming out?
 - c. What do you think this represents?
 - d. How do your actions and words affect others?
 - e. How can they be damaging?
6. Discuss with students that even though the paper is crumpled, the character is still a valuable person. However, the mean words and actions have long-term effects on them. Mention the importance of being kind to others.

3. I See What You See In Me

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 4 to 6

TIME: 10-15 minutes

MATERIALS: Writing utensils, paper

OBJECTIVE

To promote a positive classroom community and to encourage kindness to oneself and others.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Have each student write their name at the top of a piece of paper.
2. Tell students to crumple up their paper and gently toss them across the room on the count of three.
3. Instruct students to pick up a piece of paper (not their own), flatten it, and to return back to their desks to write something positive about that student in 30 seconds (i.e., an attribute, compliment, or something they admire).
4. Have students re-crumple their papers and pass these papers in a rotation to the next person for them to write something positive on their sheet (if students receive their own, they can feel free to write something positive about themselves). Remind students to be unique and creative when writing positive things - do not be repetitive!
5. Repeat Step 4 until the rotation of papers is complete and all the students have had a chance to write one positive thing on everyone's paper.
6. Students can then retrieve their own paper and read all the positive comments. Students can feel free to share the comments to their classmates or keep it to themselves!
7. Encourage students to use these papers as a great reminder of all the positive ways people see them, especially when they have a hard time recognizing these positive attributes in themselves.

MODIFIED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS

1. Have each student create their own google slide within a classroom google presentation with their name. They can include small graphics and personalize it if they want as well.
2. Instruct students to go through all of the different slides, starting with the slide directly after their own, and to write something positive about each student. They will have 10 minutes to complete the activity and will want to write positive comments for as many students as possible in that time.
3. For each student, they will use either a coin that they have or an electronic coin flipper such as <https://www.google.com/search?q=flip+a+coin> to determine how many positive compliments they will be writing on that particular person's google slide. If the coin lands on heads, they will be writing 1 positive compliment, and if it lands on tails, they will be writing 2 positive compliments.
4. The students can write these positive compliments by adding text to the google slides.
5. Once the ten minutes are up, students can look at their own google slide. This can be done by presenting the entire google slides presentation using screen share during the google meet, or by allowing the student to view them in their own time and read them out if they feel like sharing.
6. Encourage students to save their individual google slide by printing it or saving it to their personal electronic device.
7. A follow-up discussion can occur, to discuss how hearing positive compliments felt, or whether they enjoyed getting to write them for their peers.

Prompts:

- a. Why is it important to give compliments and praises to your peers?
- b. How did it feel to receive compliments and praises, and to give them as well?
- c. Why would it be especially important for students that have a hard time recognizing these positive attributes in themselves?
- d. Can you always tell if someone is having a bad day, and would benefit from a positive compliment?

4. Take a Compliment

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 4 to 6

TIME: 20-30 minutes

MATERIALS: "Take a Compliment" posters, tape, scissors, writing utensils

OBJECTIVE

To teach students to think about their words before saying them and to encourage students to be kind to one another and to themselves.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Put students into groups or have them work individually to create a "Take a Compliment " poster using the template/example on page 10.
2. Have students create their poster with writing utensils.
3. Instruct them to pre-cut the tabs on their poster on the vertical dotted line so that it is ready to be posted around the classroom.
4. Tell the students that at any time, anyone can go up and tear off a compliment for themselves or give one to their peers to brighten their day.
5. Engage in a conversation about how a small compliment can go a long way.

MODIFIED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS

1. Put the students into small breakout groups, and encourage them to use a google document or google slide that can be worked on collaboratively
2. Have the students create "compliment posters" in their small groups. Images from the internet or handmade drawings can be uploaded to include in the poster. Each poster should have 10 different positive compliments.
3. Have the students present their completed posters to the class during a google meet once they are finished.
4. Engage in a conversation about how a small compliment can go a long way,

and the idea of positive affirmations. Discuss how we are often our biggest critics, and it is important to remind ourselves of all the positive things about us, and how a great practice is to say something nice about yourself every day, as a part of mental wellness.

5. You Are Not Alone

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 4 to 6

TIME: 15–20 minutes

MATERIALS: Sticky notes (at least 2 per student), background music (optional).

OBJECTIVE

To foster a safe classroom community where students can recognize similarities between themselves, empathize with each other's concerns, and support one another.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Give each student 2 sticky notes.
2. Have students write anonymously
 - a. One thing they are concerned or worried about in this course or school year on one sticky note.
 - b. One thing they are looking forward to or feel positive about in this course or school year on the other sticky note.
3. Designate one area of the room to be for the "Concerns" and a separate area to be for the "Positives."
 - a. The areas should be wide enough for all students to post their sticky notes
 - b. E.g., Walls, whiteboards, blackboards, chart paper, etc.
4. Have students post their sticky notes (next to each other in rows) to the appropriate space (concerns vs. positives) and instruct them to spread them out.

Feel free to play soft background music for Step 5–8

5. Have students quietly walk around the class with a writing utensil and:
 - a. Read all the sticky notes (Concerns and Positives) AND
 - b. On at least one sticky note of each type, write a checkmark if you relate

to it or a positive/sympathetic expression (e.g., same, me too, I know right?).

6. Pause the class and ask them to:
 - a. Take one sticky note from the "Concerns" board to their own desks AND
 - b. Anonymously write a positive, encouraging, supportive comment (could be a piece of advice or how you relate to it).
7. Have students return and post the sticky note back on the "Concerns" area. Students can go back to the board and retrieve their original "Concerns" sticky note and read over the comments.

MODIFIED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS

1. Create Kahoot off the website Kahoot.com and ask questions surrounding mental health and popular concerns adolescents may have.
 - a. How do you feel today?
 - i. Good
 - ii. Bad
 - iii. Great
 - iv. Okay
 - b. Are you concerned about the school year?
 - i. True
 - ii. False
2. Kahoot allows students to create anonymous usernames, allowing them to feel more comfortable picking their honest answer.
3. When ready to do the activity, provide the students with the pin so that they can participate in the quiz.
4. After completing the Kahoot, discuss answers with students and explain that what they are feeling is normal. This will help to reassure students that they are not alone.

6. Flex it!

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 4 to 6

TIME: 10 -15 minutes

MATERIALS: None

DELIVERY: This activity can be completed both in class, and virtually over google meet

OBJECTIVE

To help lower stress, increase awareness, and improve overall well-being.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask students to stand up and participate in these six movements:
 - a. Flex both fists for 10 seconds.
 - Make a fist and squeeze.
 - b. Flex both biceps for 10 seconds.
 - c. Flex your chest or stomach for 10 seconds.
 - Recreate the hulk pose.

- d. Flex both legs for 10 seconds.
 - Squat or stand on your tippy toes.
 - e. Flex your feet for 10 seconds.
 - Curl your toes in and hold.
 - f. Now, shake it out!
2. Facilitate discussion about what this activity can help the students with and how this activity helps to lower stress and increase awareness.
 3. Share Research Findings.
 - a. This is called Progressive Muscle Relaxation.
 - b. Scientifically proven to reduce stress and increase self-awareness so we can recognize when we are tense.
 - c. You can use this activity to refocus your energy to different parts of your body to help decrease levels of anxiety.

7. Gratitude List

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 4 to 6

TIME: 10-20 minutes

MATERIALS: Lined Paper, writing utensils

DELIVERY: This activity can be completed both in class, and virtually using google docs

OBJECTIVE

To recognize and appreciate things to be grateful for; to build positivity and optimism.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Give each student a sheet of blank paper/get students to open a word document and have them write numbers 1-10 on the left side of the sheet in a column.
2. Give the class about 3 minutes to write down all the things they are grateful for that day. These things can include people, moments, objects (i.e., food), experiences, etc.
3. Discuss as a class what they wrote down and why they are grateful for those things.

* This can be a weekly activity. Students will have an opportunity to remember and reflect on the things they are grateful for regularly.

EXTENSION:

1. Give students a period of time for informal writing.
2. Based on the items on their gratitude list, students can be creative with their journal entry.
3. Students can freely write, write a letter directed to someone they are grateful to have in their lives, or simply blog about a positive memory.

SHARE RESEARCH FINDINGS:

- If we bring up emotions of gratitude, thankfulness, and appreciation, we release hundreds of different chemicals that help rebuild our body.
- This creates a stronger immune system, new genes and hormones that positively affect different cells and tissues that are out of balance.

Book Lists to Check Out

21 YA Books to Read During Mental Health Awareness Month for May

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/rachelstrolle/mental-health-awareness-month-books-ya-reading>

YA Books About Mental Illness and Mental Health

<https://bookriot.com/ya-books-about-mental-illness/>

11 Enlightening and Empathetic YA Novels About Mental Illness

<https://www.readbrightly.com/enlightening-empathetic-ya-novels-about-mental-illness/>

18 YA Books to Read During Mental Health Awareness Month

<https://www.epicreads.com/blog/books-for-mental-health-awareness-month/>

8 Young Adult Books That Will Change The Way You Think About Mental Health

<https://www.mghclaycenter.org/parenting-concerns/grade-school/8-young-adult-books-holiday-anytime-giving-will-change-way-think-mental-health/>

Reality Scoop: Promoting Mental Wellness with YA Literature

<http://www.yalsa.ala.org/thehub/2016/02/02/reality-scoop-january-is-mental-wellness-month/>

You're Not Alone: Mental Health Nonfiction Picks for Teens

<http://www.yalsa.ala.org/thehub/2019/09/09/mental-health-nonfiction-picks-for-teens/>

12 Kid-Approved Middle Grade Books That Tackle Mental Health

<https://www.readbrightly.com/kid-approved-middle-grade-books-mental-health/>

30 Middle-Grade Books About Mental Illness

<https://readingmiddlegrade.com/middle-grade-childrens-books-about-mental-illness/>

44 Children's Books About Mental Health

<https://childmind.org/article/best-childrens-books-about-mental-health/>

Wellness Tool Sheet

Empowerment; Self-Awareness; Kindness and Respect; Coping Strategies; Resilience

I AM SO: By completing this sentence with a positive attribute, we learn to practice self-talk. Positive self-talk helps to build self-acceptance and allows us to love ourselves for who we are. When we say kind words to ourselves, we inevitably will be more kind to others and have a more positive outlook on ourselves.

FLEX IT: We can keep ourselves mentally healthy by using our own bodies. Muscle relaxation, as well as exercise, can have a positive impact on our total wellbeing by lowering stress and increasing awareness.

DEEP-BREATHING: Deep breathing is a fundamental tool for calming anxiety and accompanies almost every other tool we use for coping with stress.

SPEAK, INSPIRE, CHANGE: Showing our appreciation for others can help us maintain positive relationships. Small gestures of kindness can positively change someone's life. Saying kind words to ourselves can help us to be more positive towards others. This helps build and strengthen relationships.

POWER STANCES: We can build confidence by using our bodies to release and express that confidence. We can counteract stress chemicals by implementing some simple body stances into our daily lives.

MUSIC THERAPY: Music has been proven to enhance an individual's emotional and social wellbeing. Creative expression is effective in reducing feelings of loneliness and stress, which can increase feelings of happiness, calmness, and emotions linked to trust.

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE: Being grateful has been proven to improve health and overall wellbeing. Gratitude helps to enhance our mood and create more positive energy.

MINDFUL MEDITATION: Trying to make decisions may be difficult but meditating and being mindful of the present situation can prevent bad decision making and aid in

rational decision making. Being mindful can lead to more positive outcomes in the future.

The Science Behind It

During the YouthSpeak visit, students hear from youth who share their personal stories about challenges they faced and how they have built resilience and used tools to cope. They learn about impactful messages related to having a voice, building empathy, self-acceptance, courage, respect, healthy relationships, strength & vulnerability, and mental health & wellness.

There is abundant research on the positive effects of mindfulness and its relationship to physical, cognitive and emotional health. Mindfulness is conceptualized as our awareness of the present moment, which is linked to our mental and physical health, while calmly acknowledging one's thoughts, feelings, and body (Toneatto & Nguyen, 2007). Mindfulness improves immune system responses and brain connectivity, and it increases one's tolerance of stressful situations (Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine 2014). In order to manage difficult emotions which are key symptoms in individuals with depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse, these emotions need to be "let out" to decrease the power they have over our bodies (Chapman, B. P. et al. 2013).

Mindfulness interventions have shown to promote increased attentional control over our emotional, behavioral, and attentional responses to threat ("Changing Your Brain by Changing Your Mind", Melanie Greenberg. 2011). The coping strategies outlined in this tool sheet are forms of mindfulness-based strategies that have shown to improve mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Positive Self-Talk is a great tool for personal growth and for overcoming anxiety and depression. Self-talk can take the form of affirmations, internal dialogue, or prayer. Choose a method that works best for you and turn it into a daily routine ("Positive self-talk for personal growth" Barton Goldsmith, 2015). The more we think positive thoughts, the stronger the neural network of positive thoughts becomes. Our synapses and dendritic trees, which are important components of learning, expand.

Thus, our brain "learns" to be positive (Wimberger, 2015). Positive thoughts are related to a stronger immune system, longer lifespan, and a healthy heart (Littrell, J. 2008). Research on positive self-talk demonstrates its potential to "change perspectives, attitudes, and reactions in regard to oneself, to others and to the circumstances in which we find ourselves" ("The Impact of Positive Self-Talk", Chopra Komal, 2012)

Healthy Relationships are key in mobilizing one's energy, being motivated to succeed, and encouraging healthy behaviors. Scientists have found that feelings of exclusion, rejection, and isolation activate areas of the brain associated with experiences of physical pain. This suggests that community and inclusion are vital to our wellbeing and happiness (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2004).

Music also has a healing effect. A study with 8 to 16-year-olds found that "those who received music therapy had significantly improved confidence and significantly reduced depression when compared to those who had treatment without music therapy" ("Music and Your Brain", Kerry Song). Moreover, singing enhances the social and emotional wellbeing of youth as it releases endorphins that make us less anxious, less stressed, smarter, healthier, happier, and more creative ("The Neuroscience of Singing", Cassandra Sheppard).

Gratitude is the quality of being thankful and a readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness. Gratitude boosts happiness, self-esteem, and positive relationships. (Watkins, P.C. et al. 2019). A research study on the power of gratitude shows improvements in psychological, emotional and physical wellbeing ("The Transformative Power of Gratitude," Marilyn Price-Mitchell, 2012). Neuroscience research on gratitude shows that being grateful has powerful cardiovascular and immunological benefits. Furthermore, it activates the "reward circuitry of the brain that produces satisfaction and the ability to understand others' mental states, moral judgments, and interpersonal bonding" ("Choose Gratitude Your Own Way for Good", Giacomo Bono, 2015).

Decision-Making is in the locus of our control. A study by Andrew Hafenbrack (2013), shows that mindfulness helped counteract habitual tendencies and promote better decision-making. Engaging in brief periods of mindfulness allowed people to make informed decisions by considering information in the present moment which

led to positive outcomes in the future ("The Neuroscience of Making a Decision", Christopher Bergland, 2015).

Teacher Tip Sheet

Let Students Know You are Always There, and You Care: Regularly remind students that you are available to talk and listen. Students will know you care about their overall wellbeing, and it will make them feel valued.

Listen and Be Open-Minded: Let students express their opinions in a respectful and safe environment. Be careful not to judge as what you consider to be a small challenge may be a large obstacle for them.

Be Calm: This is important if conversations with students become tense and heated.

- Try to put negative emotions aside when expressing feelings or concerns.
- Try not to be visibly agitated or upset.
- Try not to lecture them but guide them to make decisions smarter and healthier.

Try Not to Judge: It is important not to judge students for their mistakes but to help them learn and grow in a safe environment. Be mindful of your body language and tone of voice when taking their feelings into consideration, without judgment.

Don't Think the Worst: We sometimes think that people can't and won't change, which is stressful to think about. Try to surround yourself with positive thoughts instead. Everyone can change, but it takes time, patience, and optimism.

Celebrate Change: Students will be encouraged to repeat and exhibit new positive behavior when you:

- Support any positive change, whether big or small, that occurs.
- Notice and call attention to the strengths and positive attributes students display.
- You can truly help boost their self-esteem and self-confidence!

Building Relationships: Talk to your students about something other than academics. Having positive student-teacher relationships within professional boundaries will help students feel safe and comfortable in our classroom, which will improve students' academic success and overall wellbeing.

Set Boundaries: In order to help others, we need to help ourselves. Take a step back if you develop compassion fatigue or feel a burnout coming. There is no shame in asking for help from a professional if the situation does not get better.

Resources

- Kids Help Phone: Text- 686868 (24/7 support)
<https://kidshelpphone.ca/>
- Find trusted, culturally competent therapists that know *our* feelings and can help navigate being a strong, black woman.
<https://therapyforblackgirls.com/>
- Black Youth Helpline: serves all youth and specifically responds to the need for a Black youth specific service, positioned and resourced to promote access to professional, culturally appropriate support for youth, families and schools.
<https://blackyouth.ca/> +1416-285-9944 / +1833-294-8650

- Youth Line offers confidential and non-judgmental peer support through our telephone, text and chat services.
<https://www.youthline.ca/> +1647-694-4275
- If you or someone you know is in crisis or requires immediate support, please contact 310-COPE at 1-855-310-COPE (2673) or visit your nearest emergency department.

Apps for Students:

- Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame: This app teaches young students how to calm down and solve everyday challenges.
- Calm: This app teaches activities to help you sleep, breathe and relax.
- Headspace: Options customized for three age groups—under 5, 6-8, and 9-12. Plus, parents can use the adult version to practice breathing alongside their child.
- HelloMind: Young worriers can significantly benefit from HelloMind, an app which helps change negative thought patterns.
- Smiling Mind: It is designed to help youth through the stresses, and challenges of daily life. It offers programs for a variety of age groups, including 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, 16-18 and adults.
- MindShift: Scientifically proven strategies based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) to help you learn to relax and be mindful, develop more effective ways of thinking, and use active steps to take charge of your anxiety.

Want to Get Involved and Help Empower Other Youth and Inspire Change?

Here are some ways you can support:

- Join an event committee
- Attend our events
- Join our Board of Directors
- Follow us on social media



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- **Donate to Canada Helps**

- You can click the “Donate” Button on the www.youthspeak.ca homepage
- OR this link will take you straight to the donation page
https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/youthspeak-performance-charity-organization/?utm_expid=.Z0WUQV4rT9mKtKTXtGPdnw.0&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fyouthspeak.ca%2F

- Share your special skills with our team of youth to help build their leadership
- Perform administrative tasks that are important behind the scenes work

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