



Substance Use & Wellness



Teacher's Guide

CLASS ACTIVITIES

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YouthSpeak
Performance Charity

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 revolving around Substance Use, Addiction and Wellness. 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 Intermediate/Senior divisions but may be modified for your unique classroom.

HOW TO USE

This teacher guide has eight activities that are designed to address substance use, addiction and wellness. They can be used in the classroom to help students understand and explore important topics of substance use, addiction, 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. If needed, activities have virtual alternatives for online teaching. 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. Discussing these topics can bring up strong thoughts and feelings, and it is important to let them know that if students are experiencing any negative 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: 7 to 12

TIME: 10 -15 minutes

MATERIALS: Blackboard/ whiteboard/ chart paper

OBJECTIVE

To brainstorm with students what mental health, substance use, addiction, and wellness means to them. By the end of this activity, students will be familiar with the multiple ways to promote individual wellness.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Have the students arrange themselves into small groups of 5-6. Initiate a whole class discussion on what mental health, substance use, addiction, and wellness are, by using the suggested brainstorming prompts.

Prompts:

- a. What comes to mind when you hear "Substance," "Addiction," or "Wellness?"
- b. What does wellness look like to you?
- c. What does substance use look like to you?
- d. What does addiction look like to you?
- e. What do you do when you feel stressed? Anxious? Sad? Upset?
- f. How can you work towards having positive mental health?
- g. How can the community change their outlook on addiction?

2. In their small groups, have students come up with positive coping mechanisms and how to maintain positive mental health and wellness. **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.

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

MODIFIED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS

1. During a google meet, initiate a class discussion on what mental health, substance use, addiction, and wellness means to the students, using the following brainstorming prompts.

Prompts:

- a. What comes to mind when you hear "Mental Health?"
- b. What comes to mind when you hear "Substance Use", "Addiction" or "Wellness?"
- c. What does wellness look like to you?
- d. What does substance use look like to you?
- e. What does addiction look like to you?
- f. What do you do when you feel stressed? Anxious? Sad? Upset?
- g. How can you work towards having positive mental health?
- h. How can the community change their outlook on addiction?

2. Arrange the students into small breakout room groups of 5-6. Have students come up with positive coping mechanisms and how to maintain positive mental health and wellness. **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 google doc/google 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.

2. Choices In a Jar

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 12

TIME: 25 - 30 minutes

MATERIALS: Blackboard/ whiteboard/ chart paper, small pieces of paper, writing utensils, jar

OBJECTIVE

To provoke students to discuss and make healthy choices. By the end of this activity, students will be able to recognize the difference between a healthy choice and a choice that might be harmful to them, all in respect to mental health, substance use, addiction, and wellness.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Fill up a jar with pieces of paper. On each piece of paper, an action or choice should be written. Some of the choices should be healthy ones, and some choices should demonstrate un-healthy options. There should be an equal amount of healthy and unhealthy choices within the jar.

Examples:

- a. I decided to eat a healthy breakfast today.
 - b. I played video games all night and only got 3 hours of sleep.
 - c. My friends pressured me to try something I didn't want to do. . .
2. Split the glass up into groups of 5-6 and ask each group member to pick a piece of paper from the jar.
 3. Each student should have at least one piece of paper. As a group, they will take a piece of chart paper and split it up into two columns.
 4. Students will place healthy choices into one column and unhealthy choices into another column.
 5. After all groups have completed making their decisions, they will present their chart paper to the class and initiate a class discussion about healthy and unhealthy choices.
 6. Additionally, you can show students this video about healthy and unhealthy choices: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HENohs6yYw>

MODIFIED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS

1. Create word or google docs, each document having a series of healthy and unhealthy choices on them.

Examples:

- a. I decided to eat a healthy breakfast today.
 - b. I played video games all night and only got 3 hours of sleep.
 - c. My friends pressured me to try something I didn't want to do. . .
2. During a google meet, arrange students into small groups of 5-6 and have them go into breakout rooms. Assign each group a google doc with the aforementioned choices on them.
 3. Ask students to brainstorm why some of those choices are healthy or unhealthy. Additionally, get the students to detail the reasons on the google document given.
 4. Once the class is altogether again. Initiate a class discussion and have each group present their ideas to the class on why certain choices are healthy and why others are unhealthy.
 5. Additionally, you can show students this video about healthy and unhealthy choices:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_HEnohs6yYw

3. Apparent Addictions

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 12

TIME: 25 - 30 minutes

MATERIALS: Blackboard/whiteboard/chart paper, Writing utensils, paper

OBJECTIVE

To familiarize students with the signs of addictive behaviour. By the end of this activity students will be able to identify addictive behaviour in order to prevent it from happening within their own lives and learn how to develop healthy habits.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. As a class watch the following video or videos:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkeBTQ6JerY&t=10s>
2. Split the class into three groups and assign each group a scenario. Use the following scenarios or create your own.

Scenario 1:

Shayla has been noted to skip school to go to the library to surf the web. Before she got a phone, Shayla used to love writing to help her express herself. Additionally, her teachers also congratulated her on her writing in school. Now on the rare occasions when she is at school, she tends to be glued to her phone. Shayla's marks are becoming impacted. Additionally, Shayla used to take full advantage of having her own room and slept a full eight to ten hours every night. Now, Shayla is always looking tired because she is suspected of staying up in the middle of the night and won't get off social media even though she is supposed to be sleeping.

Pros: loves writing, knows how to express herself, would get a full eight hours of sleep

Cons: She is skipping school, losing sleep, grades are dropping, not paying attention

Scenario 2:

Raymond is a good student, who has a great relationship with his mother. Now, Raymond always pretends to go to school, then rushes

back when his mom is at work. At home, he plays video games all day. He intercepts attendance calls, and his mom doesn't get home until 6:00pm. Additionally, Raymond is a friendly boy who has many friends and likes to hang out with them after school. Now, Raymond no longer sees his friends and his marks are beginning to take a turn for the worse. Raymond's friends don't know if they should tell his mom that he never shows up to school or not.

Pros: Friends care enough to question if they should tell his mom, good student, good relationship with mom, friendly

Cons: Lying to the people around him, social isolation, grades dropping

Scenario 3:

Claudia wakes up early every day. She has a healthy breakfast and then goes on a jog before the school day starts. Recently, Claudia has started to have an obsession with her weight and excessively exercises and eats smaller portions. Even when she tries her best to concentrate at school, and finds that when she can't, she snacks on carrots to help keep her focused. She eats a healthy lunch and then usually has a sports activity or tutoring after school. When she gets home, she does her homework. She skips dinner and tells her family she is not hungry and uses the rest of the free time she has left, she usually spends drawing or reading until she has to go to bed.

Pros: She is eating healthy, has a routine

Cons: skips dinner, obsessed with health

3. Give each group a chart paper and tell students to point out each kid's strengths and challenges in each scenario.
4. Initiate a class discussion in which students present to the class what was helpful or unhelpful with their given scenario. You can mention how every person has strengths, and by focusing and supporting their strength we can help them overcome their challenges
5. The teacher can also initiate a class discussion and teach students about some healthy and unhealthy habits and how they can be incorporated into their lives.

Healthy tips can include some of the following:

- a. Exercising
- b. Reading
- c. Drawing
- d. Drinking more water

6. The class can also watch the following light-hearted video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-vyTE35ELO>

Note: Make sure to clarify that getting a new addiction means replacing unhealthy habits with new ones.

MODIFIED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS

1. As a class watch the following video or videos:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkeBTQ6JerY&t=10s>
2. On google meet, split the class into three groups and direct them to go into breakout rooms. Assign each group a scenario on a word or google doc. Use the aforementioned scenarios or create your own.
3. Tell each group to utilize the document and either point out what the strengths and challenges are with the scenario in relation to the addictions video.
4. Initiate a class discussion in which students present to the class what was helpful or unhelpful with their given scenario. You can mention how every person has strengths, and by focusing and supporting their strength we can help them overcome their challenges
5. The teacher can also initiate a class discussion and teach students about some healthy and unhealthy habits and how they can be incorporated into their lives.

Healthy tips can include some of the following:

- e. Exercising
- f. Reading
- g. Drawing
- h. Drinking more water

6. The class can also watch the following light-hearted video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-vyTE35ELO>

Note: Make sure to clarify that getting a new addiction means replacing unhealthy habits with new healthy ones.

4. Crumpled Character

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 12

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). During this time, the teacher can walk around the classroom to ensure positive messages are being written.
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. Stop the Stigma

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 12

TIME: 20–30 minutes (This activity can be completed over multiple days).

MATERIALS: Whiteboard/blackboard/ paper /chart paper, writing utensils

OBJECTIVE

To understand the term "stigma" and the current negative attitudes towards substance use, addiction and mental wellness. To establish ways to stop the stigma around addiction.

INSTRUCTIONS

Part 1: Understanding Stigma around Substance Use and Addiction (10 minutes)

1. Have a class discussion about what the meaning of "stigma" is. You can create a word cloud on the whiteboard/blackboard of students' responses.
2. You can extend this word cloud to the students' responses of stigma around addiction.

Part 2: Understanding Stigma (10–15 minutes)

3. Put students into groups of 4–5 and have them discuss questions about stigma:
 - a. How does knowing the meaning of 'stigma' make you feel?
 - b. How do substance use and addiction stigma promote shame?
 - c. How can stigma affect someone's self-esteem and behaviours?
 - d. How can substance use and addiction stigma affect someone's beliefs?
 - e. What are some ways you can help stop the stigma around substance use and addictions?
4. Bring students back together and have an open discussion about what was discussed in groups.

Part 3: Stop the Stigma (time may vary)

5. Put students back into groups to write down on chart paper how to stop the negative stigma around addiction in the school, at home, and in the community (i.e., students can create school or community programs to help understand addictions and to help students dealing with addiction).

EXTENSION: The teacher can turn this into a lengthier project by asking students to create an infographic, app, organisation, charity, etc., to stop the stigma around addiction.

MODIFIED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS

Part 1: Understanding Stigma around Substance Use and Addiction (10 minutes)

1. Have a class discussion about what the meaning of “stigma” is. You can create a word cloud on a google document of students’ responses.
2. You can extend this word cloud to the students’ responses of stigma around substance use and addictions.

Part 2: Understanding Stigma (10–15 minutes)

3. Put students into breakout rooms of 4–5 and have them discuss questions about stigma:
 - a. How does knowing the meaning of ‘stigma’ make you feel?
 - b. How do substance use and addiction stigma promote shame?
 - c. How can stigma affect someone’s self-esteem and behaviours?
 - d. How can substance use and addiction stigma affect someone’s beliefs?
 - e. What are some ways you can stop the negative stigma around substance use and addiction?
4. Bring students back together and have an open discussion about what was discussed in groups.

Part 3: Stop the Stigma (time may vary)

5. Put students back into small groups in breakout rooms to write down on paper or a google document how to stop the negative stigma around mental health in the school, at home, and in the community (i.e., students can create school or community programs to help understand substance use and addictions and to help students dealing with substance use or addictions).

EXTENSION: The teacher can turn this into a lengthier project by asking students to create an infographic, app, organisation, charity, etc., to stop the stigma around substance use and addictions using a program such as google slides or Canva.

5. One Step At A Time

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 10

TIME: 20-30 minutes

MATERIALS: Chart paper / large construction paper and writing utensils

OBJECTIVE

To foster a safe classroom community and assess strategies for managing mental wellness. To understand the healthy choices that can be made to positively influence our physical, emotional and mental well-being.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place students into 4 groups.
2. Each group will be responsible for a different topic in dealing with mental health. When assigning these topics, give each group a piece of chart paper or a large piece of construction paper. What each group should discuss and write down is outlined next to their topic: Students can use their devices or Chromebooks if needed for the following topics.
 - a. "Recognition" - Emotions, feelings, and symptoms for individuals experiencing anxiety and/or depression. Students can talk about possible triggers through personal experiences if they are comfortable sharing.
 - b. "Thinking Right" - helpful thoughts or empowering statements that can help individuals through these experiences (i.e., "I can get through this", "Stop worrying about the things I can't control, and get a hold of the things I can control ", etc.).
 - c. "Active Steps" - any form of activity that individuals can take or coping strategies that can help individuals face anxiety and/or depression in short-term and long-term situations (i.e., physical activity, connecting with trusted friends or family members, etc.).
 - d. "Relaxation Tool " - exercises to help promote calmness and lower stress levels for individuals faced with anxiety and/or depression, along with a resource list
3. Each group will present their topic to the class and promote a class

discussion in creating an open environment for mental health.

4. Students can turn their work into a poster or an infographic to be posted in the classroom as resources for all students.

MODIFIED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTIONS

1. Assign the students into four different groups. They can meet as a group in breakout rooms on google meet.
2. Each group will be responsible for a different topic in dealing with mental health. The students can record their brainstormed ideas using a google document, where they can work collaboratively.

Topics include:

- a. "Recognition" - Emotions, feelings, and symptoms for individuals experiencing anxiety and/or depression. Students can talk about possible triggers through personal experiences if comfortable discussing.
 - b. "Thinking Right" - helpful thoughts or empowering statements that can help individuals through these experiences (i.e., "I can get through this," "Stop worrying about the things I can't control and get a hold of the things I can control," etc.).
 - c. "Active Steps" - talking about any form of physical activity that individuals can take or coping strategies that can help individuals face anxiety and/or depression in short-term and long-term situations (i.e., physical activity, connecting with trusted friends or family members, etc.).
 - d. "Relaxation Tool " - discussing exercises to help promote calmness and lower stress levels for individuals faced with anxiety and/or depression, along with a resource list of things I can control ", etc.).
3. Each group will present their topic to the class and facilitate a class discussion.
 4. Students can turn their work into a poster or an infographic using google slides or Canva that can be saved to their personal devices for future reference and shared within the google classroom for all students to see.

6. You Are Not Alone

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 10

TIME: 15-20 minutes

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

OBJECTIVE

To help students understand how school stress can be good for wellness. 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, have a discussion with students about the answers and explain that what they are feeling is normal, to reassure them that they are not alone.

7. Stress and Positivity List

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 10

TIME: 10-20 minutes

MATERIALS: Lined Paper, writing utensils

DELIVERY: This activity can be completed both in class, and virtually by using google documents.

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 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 stressors in their life. These things can include people, moments, experiences, etc.
3. Give the class about 3 minutes to write down ways they can be more optimistic about these stressors. This can include activities, tips, mindset, etc.
4. Discuss as a class how we can think positively about stress and how it can have a positive impact on life.

EXTENSION:

1. Give students a period of time for informal writing.
2. Based on the items on their list, students can be creative with their journal entry.
3. Students can freely write, write a letter directed to the stressor or about how to handle this stressor.

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.

EXTENSION:

1. Give students a period of time to write an informal journal entry.
4. Based on the items on their gratitude list, students can be creative with their journal entry.
5. Students can freely write. They can pretend this is a letter directed to someone they are grateful to have in their lives, or simply write about a positive memory.

8. Identify the Stressor

ORGANIZATION

GRADE: 7 to 10

TIME: 10-20 minutes

MATERIALS: writing utensils, lined paper or personal device

DELIVERY: This activity can be completed both in class, and virtually by using google documents.

OBJECTIVE

To recognize the importance of learning how to handle stress.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Organize students into groups of 4-6. Get them to identify different situations that cause stress. (Example: too much homework, moving, etc.,)
2. Ask them to identify the different consequences and reactions that may occur.
3. Allow them to brainstorm for 5 minutes.
4. Tell them to stop thinking.
5. Ask students how they feel.
6. Ask students if any of these actions have happened yet.
7. Discussion: Explain to students that sometimes stress is all in one's mind. The more you think about a situation, the more stress can arise.
8. Take away from activity: To catch yourself before you start to over analyze and allow stress to take over your mind.

Book Lists to Check Out

10 Important Books Featuring Young People and Addiction

<https://sohopress.com/10-books-featuring-young-people-and-addiction/>

Books for Teens about Alcohol and Drug Abuse

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/lists/books-for-kids-and-teens-about-alcohol-and-drug-abuse>

Addiction Awareness in YA Fiction

<https://bpl.bibliocommons.com/list/share/100083751/1702897861>

YA Drug and Substance Abuse Novels

https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/2160.YA_Drug_Substance_Abuse_Novels

9 Books On Physical and Mental Wellness for Teens

<https://www.readbrightly.com/books-on-wellness-teen/>

Body, Mind & Health - Teen Fiction

https://www.barnesandnoble.com/b/books/teen-fiction/body-mind-health-teen-fiction/_/N-2978q8Z1a08

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/>

11 Enlightening and Empathetic YA Novels About Mental Illness

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

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/>

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.

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.

MUSIC THERAPY

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

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, behavioural, and attentional responses to threat ("Changing Your Brain by Changing Your Mind", Melanie Greenberg. 2011). Mindfulness exercises help to empower people to intentionally reshape their brain. 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 behaviours. Scientists have found that feelings of exclusion, rejection, and isolation activates 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).

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
- Naseeha is a 12pm-12am confidential & anonymous helpline for Muslim youth to discuss mental health & wellness struggles.
Text: 1-866-627-3342 Phone: 1-866-627-3342
- Hope For Wellness is a 24/7 helpline for indigenous peoples and the chat is online at their website, phone and chat counseling is available in English and French. On request, phone counseling is also available in: Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut.
- 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.
- ConnexOntario is focusing on mental health and addiction services in the province 1-866-531-2600

Apps for Students:

- Calm: This app teaches activities to help you sleep, breathe and relax.
- 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 Behavioural 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



@youthspeakcan



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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

www.youthspeak.ca

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