



GRADES 6-8

Mental Health Literacy Instructional Units

ADVOCATING FOR MY MENTAL HEALTH





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LEGEND



WARM
UP



DIRECT
INSTRUCTION



WHOLE
CLASS
DISCUSSION



INDEPENDENT
WORK



SMALL
GROUP



MOVEMENT
MOMENT



MINDFUL
MOMENT

Foreword

In order to achieve the Department of Public Instruction’s vision of all students graduating from high school academically prepared and socially and emotionally competent, Wisconsin schools and staff must be empowered to support the whole child. Working together, will enable us to build equitable school communities that promote social and emotional wellness, focus on strong positive relationships, are inclusive for all, and build on the resilience of individuals and systems. With the DPI’s vision in mind, we encourage educators to view mental health as an asset that can and should be actively built and strengthened through proactive supports for all students.

One important strategy for promoting mental health and wellness in all students is increasing their mental health literacy or knowledge, beliefs, and skills related to mental health challenges that help students recognize, prevent, and manage them. In the same way students are taught how to be physically healthy, educators can intentionally build the skills students need to maintain positive mental health. Students look to school staff to lead essential conversations about mental health. These essential conversations and opportunities for skill-building move Wisconsin towards the DPI’s mission of every student having access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, across race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, sexual orientation, family background, or family income.

The Department would like to acknowledge the contributions of the youth, caregivers, community mental health providers, educators, and other community partners that shaped the development of these units. These partners played an instrumental role in prioritizing the mental health knowledge and skills that are important to Wisconsin communities. Our hope is that these units will build lifelong skills for maintaining mental health and wellness, opening the door to honest dialogue about mental health in the classroom, school, and community.



Jill K. Underly, PhD
State Superintendent, Department of Public Instruction

Twenty percent of all students have a diagnosable mental health condition – a number that many believe has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic led to the closing of school buildings and financial instability for many families.

These Mental Health Literacy Units of Instruction offer skills-based lessons on mental health that we hope will allow students to better understand their own mental health, know where to get help, and be able to support friends experiencing mental health challenges. The accompanying caregiver lesson plans we hope will generate helpful school and family conversations about wellness.

The Wisconsin Office of Children’s Mental Health values collaboration across systems, data-driven approaches, lived experience leadership, and equity among all stakeholders. We are pleased to have been able to play a role in ensuring that our guiding principles were employed in the development of these Mental Health Literacy Units of Instruction. We would like to extend our thanks to the volunteers and staff who dedicated their time to creating this unique resource.

For some time, Wisconsin students have been telling us that they want more and better-informed conversations about mental health at school. We hope these lessons contribute to that goal, while also affording students the information they need to better support themselves and one another in a rapidly changing world.



Linda A. Hall

Linda A. Hall
Director, Wisconsin Office of Children’s Mental Health



What is Mental Health?



Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being, and it affects how people think, feel, and act. Although mental health is often thought of as the opposite of mental illness, research supports the idea that positive mental health includes both the absence of mental health challenges and the presence of high levels of social, behavioral, and emotional well-being (Greenspoon and Saklofske 2001). Students with positive mental health are able to regulate their emotions, cope with stressors, and demonstrate age-appropriate behavior. They also have greater connection to their school, better academic functioning, show more prosocial behaviors, and report less bullying and victimization in school than students without positive mental health (Arslan & Allen 2020). These outcomes demonstrate how student mental health is an asset that can and should be actively developed in schools.

PURPOSE OF THIS UNIT

The purpose of this unit of instruction is to increase mental health literacy in grades 6-8 students using a skills-based health approach. Mental health literacy includes the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to build and maintain positive mental health and recognize mental health challenges and seek appropriate help. Mental health literacy is a key strategy for promoting positive mental health in students and staff and is part of a larger school mental health effort. Wisconsin's approach to school mental health utilizes an equitable multi-level system of supports or a framework for providing students with a continuum of mental health and wellness supports from universal prevention through targeted early intervention and treatment. Universal strategies are the supports all students receive within a school to promote positive mental health. This unit of instruction is a universal approach to building wellness and provides a foundation for students who may need a greater level of mental health support.

In order to provide alignment across school mental health efforts, the unit learning plans are aligned to [Wisconsin's Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Competencies](#). The SEL competencies provide a common language for understanding the progression of social and emotional learning from early childhood through adulthood and communicate the skills that are meaningful and relevant to Wisconsin communities. These social and emotional competencies provide a strong foundation for lifelong mental health literacy.

Preparing to Implement the Unit in Your Classroom

Educators wishing to implement this unit of instruction will have varying levels of familiarity and comfort with talking to students about mental health. Your school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses have specialized training in mental health and wellness and can provide support. Some schools may use a co-teaching model to introduce students to the pupil services professionals in their building and to have support on hand if student needs arise. The following list includes resources and suggestions for successful implementation of this content in the classroom:

- Increase Your Mental Health Literacy
- Create and Hold Classroom Norms
- Utilize a Framework for Responding to Students
- Strengthen Your Compassion Resilience

INCREASE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

Mental health literacy is important for both students and teachers. Without a solid understanding of mental health and wellness, classroom discussions and activities may inadvertently perpetuate stigma related to mental health.

If you are interested in increasing your knowledge about building and maintaining mental health, identifying mental health challenges, seeking appropriate help, or decreasing stigmatizing attitudes related to mental health, check out the following resources:

- [Youth Mental Health First Aid Training](#)
- [Mental Health Stigma Reduction Toolkit](#)
- [DPI Resilience and Hope Module](#)
- [Office of Children’s Mental Health Reducing Stigma Fact Sheet](#)
- [Mental Health of America Wisconsin Fact Sheets](#)
- [Rogers Behavioral Health Stories of Recovery](#)

CREATE AND HOLD CLASSROOM NORMS

The practice of creating and holding classroom norms with your class establishes expectations for how students would like to be treated and how they plan to treat others. Creating a supportive, positive learning environment is especially important when implementing a unit on mental and emotional health. Be sure to review expectations and agreements that will create a safe, inclusive, and affirming space for each student. For example, the norm of “pass or participate” allows students to decide whether or not they would like to contribute to the current conversation. This increases safety by ensuring students have a choice in how they interact with the lessons. Classroom norms or agreements can also set the tone for respectful conversations that honor how cultural identities influence you and your students’ attitudes and experiences related to mental health. The

unit introduction includes examples of classroom norms that may be helpful. The following may serve as useful resources:

- SHAPE America [Appropriate Practices in School-Based Health Education](#)
- “[Minimizing Threats and Distractions](#)” for the Universal Design for Learning guidelines
- [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\) Creating Classroom Shared Agreements](#)
- [Learning for Justice's Classroom Culture](#)

UTILIZE A FRAMEWORK FOR RESPONDING TO STUDENTS

The content included in the lessons can prompt a variety of reactions in yourself and your students. Consider these reactions and have a plan for responding in a way that communicates to the student that you are a safe person (Buccholz et al, 2014). For example, a student who has experienced trauma may be activated by some of the content and require flexibility to engage in a self-regulation strategy. Before teaching these units, familiarize yourself with your school or district’s policy and practices for responding to students who express thoughts of suicide or harm. The resources below include several models for responding to students in a supportive way.

- [Department of Public Instruction \(DPI\) Responding to Student Disclosure of Emotional Pain, Trauma, or Mental Illness](#)
- [Wisconsin Initiative for Stigma Elimination \(WISE\) Safe Person Training](#)
- [DPI Suicide Prevention Resources](#)
- [DPI Responding to Youth in Crisis Module](#)
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(NCTSN\) Providing Psychological First Aid](#)

STRENGTHEN YOUR COMPASSION RESILIENCE

The discussions and activities included in these lessons can lead to students sharing their own experiences of suffering. Continued exposure to others’ suffering can lead to compassion fatigue or feelings of depression, sadness, exhaustion, anxiety, and irritation experienced by people who are helpers in their work or personal life (Gentry 2011). Developing compassion resilience requires exploring your professional role in alleviating student, colleague, and others’ distress while maintaining your own well-being. Additionally, intentionally cultivating your own social and emotional competence can help you remain resilient in the face of compassion fatigue (WISE Wisconsin et al, 2021). The following toolkits provide discussions, reflections, and other activities aimed at increasing your resilience.

- [DPI and Rogers InHealth Compassion Resilience Toolkit](#)
- [Transforming Education Adult SEL Toolkit](#)

Background Information & Considerations

Welcome to the “Advocating for My Mental Health” unit for grades 6-8. This is a 6-lesson unit that includes a summative assessment with an “add on” 7th lesson where students could present their final project to the rest of the class. Additional lessons could be added for in-class completion of the assessment rather than assigning the project outside of class time. This unit is meant to be taught once in its entirety, in either 6th, 7th, or 8th grade. Activities may need to be modified by increasing or decreasing the complexity of the activities in order to meet student needs.

This unit is designed as a Tier 1 intervention. Some ideas for modifications have been provided for certain activities but these do not replace accommodations. The modifications are included to help meet the needs of a range of learners. However, to meet the needs of students with different abilities and Multilingual Learners, please contact school staff who may offer additional guidance and ideas to support students.

Note: Within this unit, students will be exploring resources. If students have already learned about accessing valid and reliable information, we encourage you to use this opportunity to reinforce that learning. If students have not previously learned the skill of accessing valid and reliable information, products, and services, it is useful to make note that all of the information and resources contained within this unit are from valid and reliable sources.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

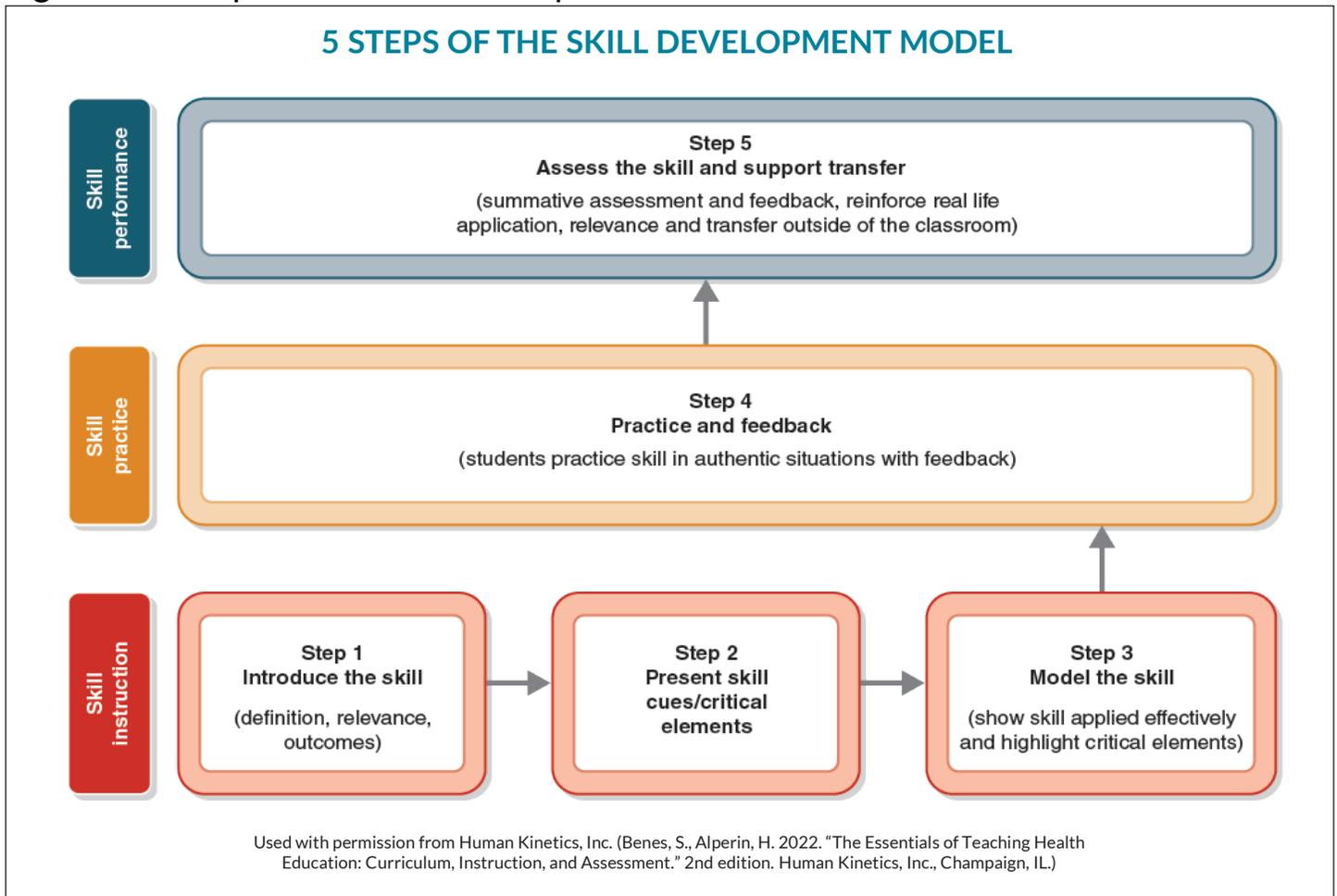
The learning objectives included in the lesson plans are aligned with standards and are written for the educator. Include “student-friendly” learning objectives and share these with students. In the lessons, language is included that summarizes the learning objectives, but the language may need to be further modified to meet the needs of students. It may also be helpful to have a visual reference for students as well.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

This unit is designed to support skill development. The skill in this unit is advocacy which is National Health Education Standard and Wisconsin State Standard 8. The content that serves as the context for developing this skill is mental and emotional health. See Figure 1 for the 5 Steps of the Skill Development Model.

All steps of the skill development model are included throughout the unit, with Steps 1, 2, and 3 being addressed in Lesson 1, Step 4 in Lessons 2 and 3. Step 5 is addressed in the authentic, summative assessment and Lessons 6 and 7. In order to effectively support skill development, all 5 steps must be included.

Figure 1: 5 Steps of the Skill Development Model



Another key aspect of the skill development model is Step 2, “Present skill cues/critical elements.” When developing skills, it is useful to clearly understand the key components that make up that skill. In this unit, the acronym “I CARE” is used and it includes all of the critical elements of the skill (or the skill cues). Having the acronym can support learning and retention of the skill cues. It is also important to note that these skill cues could be used any time you are building the skill of advocacy, including if you are teaching this skill with other topic areas. Using the same skill cues in multiple topics and potentially in multiple grades will also help support retention and will aid in positive transfer whereby students will be able to use the skill in new and novel situations. A final point here; use skill cues that work for your students and are consistent with other school models. We offer a set of skill cues here that teachers have found to be helpful, but they should be modified as needed to support your students. If modified, be sure that all critical elements of the skill are reflected in the revised skill cues.

- I** – Identify and research a relevant and meaningful health issue
- C** – Create a health-promoting position or relevant health message supported by facts and evidence that is geared to the audience
- A** – Act passionately and with conviction
- R** – Relay your health-promoting message to your audience
- E** – Examine the effectiveness of the advocacy effort

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Creating a supportive, positive learning environment is especially important when implementing a unit on mental and emotional health. Be sure to review expectations and agreements that will create a safe, inclusive, and affirming space for each student. As these topics may be difficult for students and some students may need support, identify and post school-based resources as well as other resources such as the National Suicide Lifeline and the Crisis Text Line.

Notify the school counselor in advance of teaching this unit. If students have not yet been introduced to the school counselor (and even if they have), it is recommended that the school counselor come to the class and introduce themselves to help make that connection for students. Encourage students to seek help and connect with a trusted adult during the class and to engage in self-care as needed.

When discussing class agreements, consider setting up a system for students to discreetly notify you if they need support during the unit and have an agreement that encourages students to engage in appropriate self-care. An example of this could include a thumbs up if they are leaving and are okay, a thumbs down to show they are leaving because they need support. Another example could be that students pick up a blue pass if they are leaving and are OK or a yellow pass if they are leaving and need support. Create a system that works for both teacher and students, then have a plan in place to follow up with students as needed.

The following list includes examples of possible classroom agreements:

- Pass (being able to pass on sharing)
- Self-care (taking care of needs and protecting well-being)
- Intent and impact (recognizing that even if someone means well, they can say things that can negatively impact others)
- Ouch and oops (students are affirmed in their right to identify hurtful comments and also to recognize or repair after saying something that may have hurt another)
- Acknowledge different experiences (students are reminded that everyone has different experiences, comfort, and ability to discuss this topic)
- Anonymous question box (students submit questions or comments that they would rather not ask in class)

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Acknowledge your own experiences and comfort with the topic of mental and emotional health. You are encouraged to reflect on personal strengths relative to this topic and areas for growth or gaps in knowledge/experience that may impact your ability to teach effectively. You are also encouraged to find supports for areas of growth or improvement as you teach this unit. Self-care should always be a priority for you, and you should ensure you are taking care of yourself as you help students take care of themselves in this unit.

Considerations for discussing mental health in the classroom:

- Recognize people's experiences and express emotions differently. Avoid dichotomizing feelings into good or bad and positive or negative as that introduces judgment on the emotion. Instead, consider emotions as information that we can pay attention to and learn from.
- Emphasize the scientific and physical aspects of emotions and mental health.
- Avoid using the language of “warning signs” to discuss signs and symptoms of mental illness. The phrase “warning signs” reinforces the stigma that mental illness is “bad” and we do not use similar language when discussing signs and symptoms of physical conditions. Using the terms “signs and symptoms” or “things to notice” is more accurate and less judgmental. “Warning signs” is used frequently so be mindful when using other resources.
- When discussing emotions, spend time discussing the fact that experiencing a range of emotions is a typical (avoiding the word “normal”) part of the human experience.
- If there is a student who was not advocated for at one point in their life, this unit could be challenging. If a student attempted self-advocacy or advocacy for another and was unsuccessful, this also may need additional consideration or discussion.
- Mental health can be a challenging topic, so connect with the school counselors and let students know the topics in advance of the unit. Regularly share resources that students can access if needed.

Unit Objectives

By the end of the unit, students will be able to:

SKILL OBJECTIVES

- State a health-promoting position on a topic related to mental health and support it with accurate information (NHES 2007, Standard 8.8.1; DPI 2011, Standards 8:3:A3; 8:3:B3).
- Demonstrate how to influence and support others to make health-promoting choices related to mental health (NHES 2007, Standard 8.8.2).
- Work cooperatively to advocate for the health of individuals, families, and schools (NHES 2007, Standard 8.8.3).
- Identify ways in which health messages and communication techniques can be altered for different audiences (NHES 2007, Standard 8.8.4; DPI 2011, Standard 8:3:B4).
- Practice positive self-talk.
- Demonstrate stress and anxiety management techniques.
- Set effective boundaries.
- Advocate for self and personal needs (DPI 2011, Standards 8:3:A1; 8:3:A2).
- Discuss the barriers that could be involved in an advocacy effort (DPI 2011, Standard 8:3:A4).

FUNCTIONAL INFORMATION

- Identify when help is needed, available options and resources, and what happens when you ask for help.
- Identify safe people (including peers and adults) in their lives.
- Recognize that mental health challenges are part of the human experience.
- Discuss connections between coping skills, emotional regulation, and health and well-being.
- Describe healthy relationships.
- Identify signs of stress or anxiety in self and others.

SOCIAL JUSTICE STANDARDS

- I interact with people who are similar to and different from me, and I show respect to all people (Learning for Justice 2018, Standard DI.6-8.6).
- I will work with friends, family, and community members to make our world fairer for everyone, and we will plan and coordinate our actions in order to achieve our goals (Learning for Justice 2018, Standard AC.6-8.20).

ALIGNMENT WITH CASEL & WISCONSIN SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES

Self-Awareness

- Learners will be able to identify successes and challenges and how they can learn from them (DPI 2018, Grades 6-8).

Social Awareness

- Learners will be able to provide support and encouragement to others through perspective-taking, empathy, and appreciation for diversity (DPI 2018, Grades 6-8).
- Learners will be able to identify how social norms for behavior vary across different settings and within different cultures (DPI 2018, Grades 6-8).
- Learners will be able to advocate for themselves (DPI 2018, Grades 6-8).

Relationship Skills

- Learners will be able to recognize the emotional, physical, social, and other costs of negative relationships (DPI 2018, Grades 6-8).



Assessment

I CARE ... ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

As middle schoolers, you know that sometimes it can be hard to share what you are feeling. You may also feel like you are the only one dealing with a particular problem; it can feel really lonely.

The good news is that you are never alone, because there are other people and resources who can help you navigate what you are feeling and going through.

This project has you work as part of a team of students teaching others about improving mental health, recognizing signs and signals, and reminders of coping strategies when things get hard.

In groups of 2-3 students, you will select 1 of the topic areas below and create a visual way to educate and encourage actions that will support and improve the young people's mental health.

Each advocacy project will:

- Educate about your specific mental health topic.
- Provide strategies (depending on the topic) that young people can use to improve or support their mental health.
- Encourage others to engage in behavior that promotes, improves, maintains, or supports mental health.
- Provide resources to valid and reliable sources. Sources may educate others about your topic or serve as a resource for individuals who want to know more about your topic.

Select one of the following (ideally there are an equal number of groups for each):

- What to do when a person is struggling with their mental health
 - Provide 3-5 examples of resources a person can access and use when they are struggling with a mental health concern, such as a teacher, school counselor, text line, etc.
 - Give two reasons, for each example, of why this would be a good resource to access.
 - Select 1 of the resources and explain how it works. For example, if you select reaching out to a text line, include the number, what to expect when reaching out, and some reasons that this may be a positive choice for a young person.
- Using positive coping skills for mental health
 - Provide examples of 3-5 coping strategies and demonstrate how to use each strategy. Be sure that one strategy is positive self-talk.
 - Give examples of some reasons that each coping skill can help.
 - Discuss the connection between coping skills and regulating emotions.
- Recognizing when thoughts are troublesome and identify a safe person
 - Discuss 3-5 examples of thoughts that are typical in a stressful situation.
 - Discuss 3-5 examples of thoughts that may be a signal that further help is needed.
 - Give example characteristics of a person who is a safe person to talk to.
 - Discuss why some people may be better "safe people" than others.

This project can be completed in either a “low-tech” or “high-tech” format based on what is available at your school. If students are working remotely, you may ask them to work collaboratively using breakout rooms, or other tech tools, such as Google Classroom, for creating joint work. You may also ask groups to present a summary of their work to the class. If time permits, groups can highlight a strategy or resource they found particularly useful and important for their classmates to use. You may also ask them to highlight what would make their advocacy efforts easier or more difficult to implement.

Product: To present the information, each group can select how to present the material. This may include creating a poster or infographic, a short video demonstrating the techniques discussed in the presentation, or a podcast that walks other through the strategies and examples.

RUBRIC FOR I CARE MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY PROJECT

CRITERIA	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	WORKING TOWARDS EXPECTATIONS	DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS
Educate about your specific mental health topic.	Topic is clearly explained and is specific to a mental health topic.	Topic is explained though is missing appropriate elements or contains minor inaccuracies.	Information is insufficient and contains multiple inaccuracies.
Provide strategies (depending on the topic) that young people can use to improve or support their mental health.	Clearly provides strategies (depending on the topic) that young people can use to improve or support their mental health.	Adequately provides strategies (depending on the topic) that young people can use to improve or support their mental health.	Does not clearly provide strategies (depending on the topic) that young people can use to improve or support their mental health.
Encourage others to engage in a behavior that promotes, improves, maintains, or supports mental health.	Appropriately encourages others to engage in a behavior that promotes, improves, maintains, or supports mental health.	Somewhat encourages others to engage in a behavior that promotes, improves, maintains, or supports mental health.	Does not encourage others to engage in a behavior that promotes, improves, maintains, or supports mental health.
Provide resources to valid and reliable sources. Sources may educate others about your topic or serve as a resource for individuals who want to know more about your topic.	Appropriately provides resources to valid and reliable sources.	Adequately provides resources to valid and reliable sources though they may contain minor errors or inaccuracies.	Does not provide resources that are valid and reliable AND contains major inaccuracies.

WHAT TO DO WHEN A PERSON IS STRUGGLING WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

Examples provided	Provides 3-5 accurate examples of resources a person can access and use when they are struggling with a mental health concern, such as a teacher, school counselor, text line, etc.	Provides three examples of resources a person can access and use when they are struggling with a mental health concern, such as a teacher, school counselor, text line, etc. It may contain minor inaccuracies.	Provides two or fewer examples of resources a person can access and use when they are struggling with a mental health concern, such as a teacher, school counselor, text line, etc. OR examples provided are inaccurate or inappropriate.
Explanations for each example	Give two reasons for each example of when this would be a good resource to access.	Gives 1-2 reasons for each example of when this would be a good resource to access, though it contains some minor inaccuracies or incorrect information.	Does not provide sufficient example for each of when this would be a good resource to access
Explaining one resource	Thoroughly explains one of the resources and how it works.	Adequately explains one of the resources, though it may contain minor inaccuracies.	Does not explain one of the resources OR explanation contains major errors or inaccuracies.

USING POSITIVE COPING SKILLS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

<p>Examples of Coping Strategies</p>	<p>Provides examples of 3-5 coping strategies and demonstrates how to use each strategy. One or more strategy is positive self-talk.</p>	<p>Provides three examples of coping strategies and demonstrates how to use each strategy. At least one strategy is positive self-talk.</p>	<p>Fewer than three positive coping strategies are identified and there are inaccuracies or errors with identified strategies. Self-talk strategy is not included</p>
<p>Examples</p>	<p>Appropriate examples of some reasons that each coping skill can help.</p>	<p>Examples and reasons for coping strategies are provided, though some inaccuracies or errors may be present.</p>	<p>The examples provided are not sufficient to describe appropriate coping strategies</p>
<p>Connections</p>	<p>Thoroughly discusses the connection between coping skills and regulating emotions.</p>	<p>Adequately discusses the connection between coping skills and regulating emotions OR explanation contains minor errors.</p>	<p>Does not adequately discuss the connection between coping skills and regulating emotions. The explanation contains multiple errors.</p>

RECOGNIZING WHEN THOUGHTS ARE TROUBLESOME & IDENTIFY A SAFE PERSON

Stressful Situations	Provides 3-5 examples typical in a stressful situation.	Provides 2-3 examples typical in a stressful situation.	Provides fewer than two examples typical in a stressful situation.
Signals for Support	Thoroughly describes 3-5 examples of thoughts that may signal need for further help in a situation.	Adequately describes 3-5 examples of thoughts that may signal need for further help in a situation. Or includes 2-3 thorough examples of thoughts that may signal a need for further help in a situation.	Describes fewer than two examples of thoughts that signal need for further help in a situation. Or includes two or less thorough examples of thoughts that may signal a need for further help in a situation.
Identifying "Safe People"	Provides sound examples of characteristics of a person who is safe to talk to when encountering feelings of distress.	Adequately provides examples of characteristics of a person who is safe to talk to when encountering feelings of distress.	Does not adequately provide examples of characteristics of a person who is safe to talk to when encountering feelings of distress.
Selecting "Safe People"	Gives sound reasons for why some people may be a "better" choice as "safe people" than others.	Adequately provides reasons for why some people may be a "better" choice as "safe people" than others.	Does not adequately provide reasons for why some people may be a "better" choice as "safe people" than others.

POSSIBLE MODIFICATIONS FOR THE ASSESSMENT:

Give the student advance notice on which topic they will be assigned. Either provide magazines, written examples, or pictures for the student to be able to express their ideas to the group and be an active member (e.g., if students do a poster, they can help glue on the items).

We CARE . . . about Mental Health



OVERVIEW	
TIME	~50 minutes
FOCUS <i>Step of skill development model or functional information</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skill introduction (Step 1)• Skill cues/critical elements (Step 2)• Skill modeling (Step 3)
MATERIALS	
KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognize that mental health challenges are part of the human experience.
SKILL OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss the barriers that could be involved in an advocacy effort (DPI 2011, Standard 8:3:A4).• I will work with friends, family, and community members to make our world fairer for everyone, and we will plan and coordinate our actions in order to achieve our goals (Learning for Justice 2018, Standard AC.6-8.20).

INTRODUCTION (9 MINUTES)

Warm Up (4 minutes)

As students enter, ask them to write down some strategies they might use (e.g., asking nicely, bartering, compromise) to convince someone to go along with an idea they have. For example, trying to convince a friend to watch a particular movie, a parent or caregiver to buy a new gadget, or a sibling to let you borrow an item of clothes, or practice a sport with you.

Have students note or highlight strategies most likely to be effective.

Be Present: Mindful Moment (2 minutes)

If you have not been engaging in “presencing” activities previously, discuss the benefits of taking some time to practice different strategies for focus, grounding, increasing relaxation, and decreasing stress. Suggested language: “*Scientists have discovered that people who practice mindfulness develop healthier brains and feel less stressed and anxious*” (Powell 2018). Let students know that throughout this unit, you will begin lessons with different activities that can be applied in all different areas of their lives. You should also let students know they can choose their level of participation during these activities. It is always an invitation, but all should be respectful and allow others to engage as they prefer.

“ Let’s take a moment to become present in this moment. Place your feet flat on the ground, and rest your hands either in your lap or on the table in front of you. If you feel comfortable, I invite you to close your eyes and breathe normally for a few moments. While you are breathing, I want you to listen to what is happening around you (do you hear sounds from other students or the hallway?). How does your body feel? Are you tired, nervous, anxious, happy? Just notice how you feel at this moment. Keep breathing. ”

Read the following:

Now, I invite you to take one final breath and then open your eyes and come back into the class. Welcome back. How did that make you feel?

In this unit, we are going to be talking about mental health both for ourselves and others. In each lesson, we will be learning about this topic and focusing on strategies for our own mental health. This quick exercise we just did is just one example.

Lesson Objectives (3 minutes)



Introduce the new unit! The skill of the unit is advocacy, and the topic is mental health. Key concepts to include in the definition:

1. A healthy mind and brain are important for overall health and well-being (mind-body connection)
2. Mental health affects how we think, feel, and act
3. Mental health impacts how we manage emotions and experiences

Explain that we all have mental health and that sometimes our mental health, just like our physical health, is better, sometimes worse. We all have times when we feel sad, down, upset, anxious, or struggle to engage with our peers. These are all typical experiences. For middle schoolers, we want to recognize when the feelings we are having are something we can manage on our own or when we need to seek out help and support. Also, mental health challenges are not our fault but rather are the result of a complex mix of socio-structural, family, and genetics.

Preview the assessment so that students know where they are going and what they will do at the end of the unit. Review the specific objectives for this lesson.

MAIN ACTIVITIES (40 MINUTES)

Class Agreements and Expectations (5 minutes)



Even if you have already set class agreements or expectations, it would be important to revisit them here. Remind students that everyone has different understandings and experiences with mental health and mental illness. Review key agreements [see the introduction for more information] such as:

- Speak your truth (speak from your own experience)
- Intent versus impact
- Keep an open-mind
- Practice empathy
- Respectful and affirming behavior and language
- Self-care and “need support” norms

To get us started in the unit, we will focus on the skill of advocacy—what does this really mean? Once we lay this foundation, we will make even more connections to being an advocate for mental health.

Exploring Advocacy (35 minutes)



On the board, write the word ADVOCACY and ADVOCATE. Ask students what each of those terms means. Once you have elicited comments from students, provide the following definitions:



- **Advocacy** is the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal (Merriam-Webster 2021).
- **Advocate** is one who promotes or supports the cause of an interest or group (Merriam-Webster 2021).

Types of Advocacy

- **Self-Advocacy** - Advocating on behalf of yourself (e.g., to a parent by telling them that you feel sad or worried and need support from them or a health care provider).
- **Individual Advocacy** - Speaking up on behalf of one individual or small group or encouraging an individual to adopt a specific behavior. This form of advocacy is very specific to a person’s needs or behaviors. (e.g., seeking out help from a safe adult for a friend that is in a dangerous situation OR encouraging peers to adopt coping strategies that reduce feelings of anxiety).
- **Systemic Advocacy** - Working to change laws, policies, or community norms. This form of advocacy results in the largest form of change and will ultimately affect the greatest number of people (e.g., helping to pass a law that requires middle and high school students to have recess or breaks in the day for movement).

After explaining each type of advocacy, give students some advocacy examples and ask them to identify which category it would fit into. *Note: this could be done in small groups as a “speed quiz” or at individual seats.* Feel free to include other examples relevant to your student population. To extend the activity, ask students to develop examples in their own life that fit into each category.

Technology Alternative



Create a Kahoot or other “quiz” type of

format that students can quickly select the category the examples would fall into.

Telling a friend you are too tired to chat and going to bed early instead.	Advocating for more community services to support youth mental health.	Explaining to a teacher that your small group needs help and is asking for specific support.
Doing an awareness campaign to promote healthy relationships.	Writing a letter to the school board explaining why it is important for school programs to support mental health.	Asking a parent or trusted adult for help with a hard problem.

Characteristics of an Advocate

1. Now that students understand the types of advocacy let’s discuss some characteristics of an advocate and tips for being a good advocate.

Ask students: If someone tried to convince you to engage in healthier behavior, what characteristics would you look for? How might people or organizations try to become an influencer?



Review the lists below. In pairs, have students consider which of the following is most important and why? Examples of “why” may help to spur ideas, such as it is important to me, my family believes this to be important, etc. Discuss as a group.

Positive characteristics:

- Listen to the needs of others
- Do your homework to know the facts and counter-arguments
- Formulate your message based on valid and reliable information
- Be passionate (or believe in) the message you are advocating for
- Cooperate and collaborate with others to be most effective in making change happen
- Know the audience and design the message to meet the needs of the audience
- Be willing to “try again” if it doesn’t work the first time
- Get creative!
- Good communication skills
- Be respectful when you convey your message



Characteristics to avoid when advocating - ask students why these characteristics could be problematic and barriers to advocacy efforts:

- Being a “know it all”
- Calling people names or insulting them
- Expecting everything to change the first time you try to affect change
- Using false or misleading information
- Trying to “do it alone” - we all need the support of others

Review Advocacy skill cues and note for students that if an advocate's characteristics help us be successful in our advocacy efforts, the skill cues are what we use to measure our level of success.

SKILL CUES

- I – Identify and research a relevant and meaningful health issue
- C – Create a health-promoting position or relevant health message supported by facts and evidence that is geared to the audience
- A – Act passionately and with conviction
- R – Relay your health-promoting message to your audience
- E – Examine the effectiveness of the advocacy effort

Technology Alternative



This is another opportunity to ask students to post in an online whiteboard or forum to get ideas up on the screen in front of them.



Ask students to consider if some groups of people may have an easier or harder time advocating. Are some people “more likely” to be listened to? How can we ensure all voices are heard?



2. Now that we have considered types of advocacy and characteristics of advocates let’s look at a few examples of ways to advocate. Some tools that people use to advocate include:

- Infographic
- Video PSA
- Posters
- Billboards
- Wear it on a T-Shirt
- Pamphlet/Brochure
- Podcast
- Social Media Post
- Creating a Website
- Making an Announcement at School

Even though these are all ways that we can try to advocate, each one may be more or less effective at promoting change - depending on what you are trying to achieve. Keeping all of these ways in mind, let’s explore some different types of advocacy campaigns and when and how they are often used.



3. Explain different forms of advocacy campaigns and discuss examples of each (show physical examples from your school community):

- Informational Awareness campaigns – These types of campaigns are intended to inform a large audience about an issue. They are likely to teach you some new information, raise awareness, tap into your emotions, or encourage a behavior. These campaigns can be good at giving a little information to peak interest. Think Mental Health Posters, TikTok messages, motivational sayings, and “Did you know?” type campaigns.
- Behavioral and Social Change campaigns - These campaigns encourage specific action and are more targeted to an audience. These are likely to address a specific issue within the school or community and require a large effort to make the change happen. These types of campaigns take a stand and encourage direct action to achieve the desired goal. They call on specific people to make the change with different actions for different individuals. Think Public Service Announcement campaigns, suicide help-line, peer-to-peer campaigns (such as the assessment).
- Policy and Environmental Change campaigns - These types of campaigns are intended to encourage change at a large scale level. For example, changes to laws and policies at the local, state, or federal level. When effective, the new laws or regulations affect many people, though a small group is responsible for making the change. Think letters to the administration or school board, letters, and campaigns to elected officials.

Note for students that advocacy can occur for each of these different types of campaigns for each of the levels discussed earlier (self-advocacy, individual advocacy, and systemic advocacy). In future lessons, we will be talking about different ways to advocate to help those around us.

CONCLUSION (8 MINUTES)



- Ask students to think on their own of a situation in their life that they had to advocate and which of the (positive or negative) characteristics above did they use? What was the outcome? Then share with a partner.



- Review key takeaways from the lesson and preview the next lesson.



Warm up

- Students can have a conversation with a peer who sits next to them or, if working remotely, onto a virtual whiteboard.
- Provide multiple-choice options or provide visuals of examples.
- Give students options for possible strategies to use. Then have them circle the most effective ones.

Skill Cues

- Have copies of the skill cues in students' native languages if students are multilingual. Create visual representations of the skill cues.

Main Activities

- For Activity 1, provide students with picture scenarios for them to sort instead of writing.
- Give students a handout of the questions in Activity 3 (characteristics of an advocate) and ask them to discuss in small groups prior to discussing in a large group.
- Include visuals for key terms and ideas.
- Integrate technology through a "quiz" format. However, keep in mind that doing this may be challenging for some students to respond quickly.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



Connect to times throughout history that people advocated to make the world better. Use examples related to mental health (and treatment of people) and outside mental health (e.g., with a health system, voting rights, equal treatment in sport, protecting wildlife).

Self-Talk Matters



OVERVIEW	
TIME	~50 minutes
FOCUS <i>Step of skill development model or functional info</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skill Practice & Feedback (Step 4)• Functional information
MATERIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Technology to play video clip
KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recognize that mental health challenges are part of the human experience
SKILL OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocate for self and personal needs (DPI 2011, Standards 8:3:A1; 8:3:A2)• Practice positive self-talk

INTRODUCTION (8 MINUTES)

Warm Up (2 minutes)

As students enter, invite them to reflect on and write down what they think “self-advocacy” is and how “self-advocacy” relates to mental and emotional health. To support students, consider providing a list of different ways to self-advocate.

Be Present: Mindful Moment (3 minutes)

If you feel comfortable, I invite you to close your eyes. We are going to be taking three calm, deep breaths. You may also choose to keep your eyes open and select a spot in the room to focus your gaze. Choose whichever feels most comfortable for you. Before each breath, I will give you something to focus on or think about. For the first breath, take a moment to think about someone or something that makes you smile or be happy. On the second breath, think of something that you are good at. On the third breath, think of something you want to do better and want to work hard to achieve. Invite students to share from any of the three categories. Note any mentions of things that both make students happy and good at or are good at and have to work hard for. Help them to understand that most of the time, these things overlap. Even when things make us happy, it doesn't mean that we don't have to work for them. And sometimes, even when we work for them, we still need to get help to achieve it.

Lesson Objectives (3 minutes)

Introduce the lesson. In this lesson, we will be talking about self-advocacy (remind from last class) and how we can (and should) advocate for our own mental well-being. We will also be talking about some strategies we can each use to support our own mental health.

MAIN ACTIVITIES (42 MINUTES)

Continuum of Advocacy (10 minutes)

Ask students to stand. Explain that they will think about the following questions on a continuum—not right or wrong, we all will be at different places on the line. Ask students to go to the space on the continuum that they most agree or align with. Noting that it can be anywhere along the way.



Note: You may wish to give students time to pause and think before anyone moves. This helps students recognize for themselves instead of just following where most people go.

Go through each question and then discuss as a group:

- How easy it is for young people to advocate or speak up about issues important to them.
(Very Easy -----Very Hard)
- It is easier to advocate for others than it is for myself.
(Not at all ----- Absolutely)
- For yourself, consider: The opinions of people around me make me more or less likely to agree with an idea.
(Not at all ----- Absolutely)

Debrief each question by asking students for examples and relating them to an effective advocate's characteristics (related to any topic, not just mental health). Be sure to highlight the importance and impact young people can have as advocates. Why is it easier to advocate for others?

Positive Mental Health (10 minutes)



Let students know that now that we have discussed the skill of advocacy, we are going to start learning about some of the functional information (information you can use) related to mental and emotional health.



Ask students to brainstorm what “positive mental health” looks like. What are some examples? What are some things that we can do to support our mental and emotional well-being? Noted below are some examples for you to support the conversation:

Note: Be sure to help students recognize that the examples will look different for each person. Since some mental health ailments like ADHD or eating disorders overtly interrupt young people from doing these healthy activities, like getting good sleep and eating well, you will want to ensure a range of behaviors are noted and that none are seen as the “only option” or the “best option.” How we share this list is important - we don't want to reinforce the inadequacy kids may already feel because they do not do these things.

Pre-teens and teenagers who have good mental health often:

- Feel happier and more positive about themselves and enjoy life
- Have healthier relationships with family and friends
- Do physical activity and eat a healthy diet
- Get involved in activities
- Have a sense of achievement
- Can relax and get a good night's sleep
- Feel like they belong to their communities

(Raising Children Network 2019)

What are some ways that young people can support and improve positive mental health?

- Build relationships with peers and adults
- Find ways to have fun and relax
- Eat a healthful diet
- Limit screen time
- Get regular physical activity and exercise
- Develop positive coping strategies
- Get plenty of sleep
- Take time for mindfulness and meditation
- Use positive self-talk
- Talk to trusted adults

Break the class into small groups. Give each group one of the categories above. Ask each group to come up with examples within their category of ways that middle schoolers can do this AND how doing these things could promote positive mental health.

Bring the group back together to debrief and discuss each category.

Positive Self-Talk (10 minutes)

Another strategy for promoting positive mental health is to engage in positive self-talk.

Ask students: What is positive self-talk? Why might this be an important strategy?



Positive self-talk is the way we talk to ourselves in kind and reassuring ways. The things we tell ourselves become the messages we hear, over and over. The more negative things we tell ourselves, the more likely we are to believe them...even if they are not true.



Positive self-talk is not pretending that everything is always OK. It is framing a situation in a way that acknowledges that what has happened is different than who you are. For example, if you fail a test, you can be disappointed in failing and being upset or sad. However, calling yourself names or assuming you are not smart will not help you to improve the next time. Telling yourself those things will make it harder for you to improve "Positive thoughts make the brain produce serotonin and when serotonin levels are normal, one feels happy, calmer, less anxious, more focused and more emotionally stable" (Whitaker 2021).

Just like with your friends, how you talk to yourself matters. Would you tell your friends they are stupid if they failed a test? Of course not, likely, you would want to encourage them and help them see that they can do better next time, and they are a good person.

To engage in positive self-talk, we must limit negative self-talk.

Here are some examples of self-talk strategies.

Ask students to bring out a piece of paper and write the following letters:

A

B

R

A

Watch this short video clip [Jim Kwik: How to End Negative Thinking](#) (3:52) and fill in the letters during the video. Briefly discuss the video and student takeaways.

Positive Affirmations (12 minutes)



Discuss that positive affirmations are another way to support positive self-talk. Let students know that affirmations are a form of self-advocacy because they support our mental health and well-being. When we believe what we tell ourselves and seek out support when we are struggling, we use self-advocacy. We must find our voice and believe that we are each worthy of support.



Positive affirmations work best when you:

- Use the present tense and the first person (as in, “I am enough,” “I am lovable” or “I am a good friend”)
- Frame them in the positive (instead of “I am not weak,” try “I am strong”)
- Speak them as if they are fact and truth (no mights, shoulds, or coulds)
- Repeat them confidently to yourself multiple times a day, especially before going to sleep or right before a difficult conversation or test

(Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility 2020)

Watch the following short videos:

- [A PepTalk from Kid President to You \(3:27\)](#)
- [Teen Affirmations for Living Your Best Life and Feeling Great \(5:55\)](#)

After watching the video, ask each student to write down one affirmation they are willing to try telling themselves each day for the next five days. If students are having difficulty coming up with an affirmation, they may also watch [Best Affirmations for Teens \(2:51\)](#) and read the affirmations aloud to themselves each day.

Note: Some students may also find it helpful to write down ideas during the video, while others may find it distracting. Encourage students to use the approach that works best for them.

CONCLUSION (3 MINUTES)



Debrief the above exercise (do not require all students to share their affirmation with the class) and ask students to complete an exit ticket with a short reflection of their thoughts. Ask them to write down the affirmation they are going to tell themselves.

Remind students that the stories we tell ourselves matter! The more we tell ourselves positive things, the more likely we are to believe those and work through tough times. When we tell ourselves negative things, we are more likely to believe what we tell ourselves, even if it is untrue.

Preview the next lesson.

Warm Up

- Give the students multiple-choice options or visuals.
- Provide students with notes from previous days and pre-write the questions for them.

Main Activities

- Not all video clips are necessary for the completion of the lesson. If time does not allow, modify video clip selection. You may also select other video clips that more closely align with your students.
- Encourage affirmations in a student's native language. This may make the affirmation more meaningful to that student.
- Provide both visual and written examples of positive mental health and healthful strategies. When students break up into smaller groups, the written and visual examples can go to the group with them.
- Preview group work questions the day before and provide some examples that the student can select from.
- Give students a list of affirmations to select from and have them either write or circle the affirmation(s) they would like to use.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



Connect to the nervous system and the brain; the science behind positive affirmations and neural pathways (why we feel emotions in our bodies).



Connect community norms and values with strategies for improving mental health.

LESSON
3

Managing Stress and Anxiety

OVERVIEW	
TIME	~50 minutes
FOCUS <i>Step of skill development model or functional info</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill Practice (Step 4) • Functional information
MATERIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to meditations, <i>Stress Station Worksheet</i> • Chart paper
KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss connections between coping skills, emotional regulation, and health and well-being. • Identify signs of stress or anxiety in self and others.
SKILL OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate stress and anxiety management techniques. • Advocate for self and personal needs (DPI 2011, Standards 8:3:A1; 8:3:A2).

INTRODUCTION (9 MINUTES)

Warm Up (4 minutes)

As students enter, ask them to describe how they have been doing with their positive affirmation. Have they been able to repeat the affirmation to themselves, or have they been finding it difficult? Why?

Be Present: Mindful Moment (2 minutes)

Take a moment to check-in with your emotions. In your seated position, with feet on the floor and arms relaxed either in your lap or on the desk in front of you, think about how you feel right now. You may choose to keep your eyes open and select a spot in the room to focus your gaze or close your eyes and take a moment to consider how you are feeling. Are you feeling tense or relaxed? Do you feel awake or tired? Are you feeling calm or stressed?

Once you have taken this self-assessment, stand up. Select a movement that you can use to describe how you are feeling. For example, maybe you choose to run in place because you have lots of energy, or take 3 slow breaths because you feel calm and relaxed, or do some slow stretching because it will loosen your muscles.

The idea is to move your body in a way that feels good for you for a few moments before we begin the lesson. Be sure to breathe while doing your movements. Take one more full breath and, as you exhale, push out all of the stress from your body. Breathe normally and welcome to the lesson.

Lesson Objectives (3 minutes)

Today's lesson is about stress and the ways that stress can make our bodies feel. Sometimes, when we feel stressed, it may show up as feeling anxious, feeling like your heart is racing, feeling overwhelmed, tight jaw, feeling dizzy, or having a hard time focusing, which may lead to feeling burnt out and not wanting to engage in our usual activities. We will discuss common stressors and some strategies for managing stress and anxiety to avoid becoming burnt out or overwhelmed. Today's lesson supports what we did last time related to self-advocacy. When we learn about strategies for managing our own stress, and know when to seek out help and support for our stress, we can better advocate for our own needs.

MAIN ACTIVITIES (35 MINUTES)

Let's Talk About Stress! - Understanding it and Why it is important (10 minutes)

Show this definition up on the screen for students to see while it is read. According to the [Cleveland Clinic](#),

“Stress is a normal human reaction that happens to everyone. In fact, the human body is designed to experience stress and react to it. When you experience changes or challenges (stressors), your body produces physical and mental responses. That’s stress.

Stress responses help your body adjust to new situations. Stress can be positive, keeping us alert, motivated and ready to avoid danger. For example, if you have an important test coming up, a stress response might help your body work harder and stay awake longer. But stress becomes a problem when stressors continue without relief or periods of relaxation.

”

(Cleveland Clinic 2021)

Small Group Brainstorm

Place chart paper around the room and ask students to work with a small group on their paper to make a list of words that describe stress and what it is like to feel stressed. Then, ask students to write down some ways that they think stress can show up in our bodies.

Ask students to take their seats, review some of the definitions, and give them more examples of how stress shows up in their bodies from the list below. These can also be projected onto the screen for students to view after the small group activity.

What Happens When the Body is Stressed?



Suggested language: "If you perceive a situation as stressful, part of your brain (hypothalamus region) sends a message that eventually releases a stress hormone, which gives us more energy by releasing sugar into our blood. Sometimes we need that energy, but other times it can make us feel irritated or overwhelmed" (Let's Talk Science 2021). The body can exhibit a myriad of physical health and mental health symptoms when it is stressed, these can include:

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Sleep problems and exhaustion
- Irritability
- Not engaging in usual activities (feeling burnt out)
- Stomach and digestive problems
- Weakened immune system
- Distorted and intrusive thoughts
- Headaches, dizziness, shaking
- Sadness
- Pain the chest and heart
- Depression
- Panic attacks

Ultimately, stress has the ability to impact:

- Body
- Mind
- Emotions
- Behavior

Technology Alternative



Ask students to note ideas onto a JamBoard or Padlet. If using Peardeck, this is also an opportunity to have students respond directly to the presentation.

Large Group Brainstorm



What are some common things that can cause you and other middle schoolers stress? Record answers on the board. Ask students: How do you know something is stressful? (Responses will likely include answers such as: how it makes me feel, I get nervous or anxious, or I get really grumpy and am mean to my friends and family, etc.)

Discuss why these things are stressful for students and whether all forms of stress are "bad". Help students to see that while a little stress may be useful in some circumstances, being stressed a lot/most of the time is not good for either the brain or the body because if left unaddressed, it can lead to being overwhelmed by our emotions!

Tips for Managing Stress (25 minutes)



Together, let's explore some strategies for managing stress. There are various ways to manage stress, and each individual is unique in what will work best. The important thing to remember is that when we manage our stress, we are better able to cope with stress and strong emotions, which will ultimately support our ability to regulate our emotions.



- Exercise and physical activity
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Belly breathing
- Coloring
- Eating well
- Gratitude and being grateful for what you have
- Positive self-talk
- Laughing (laughing with friends, watching funny things, or reading funny things)
- ** Student additions to the list **

Note: Students may find it helpful to have written instructions at each station printed on a notecard or piece of paper.

Sample Student Stations

Students will be able to select 2 different stress-reducing techniques to try during the remaining class time. Prior to students selecting, explain all of the options. Have students complete a sample worksheet that collects what they did and how it made them feel.

Meditation

Select from one of the following sites with recorded meditations (approximately 5-10 minutes long) or from another site you prefer.

- [Mindfulness for Teens - Guided Meditation](#)
- [Observing your Thoughts Meditation](#)
- [8 Minutes of Calm](#)

Coloring Station

Set up a station with teen-friendly coloring pages and colored pencils, markers, crayons.

Gratitude Station

Set up a station with prompts and ask students to journal or reflect upon one of the prompts:

- Today, I am thankful for...
- Something I liked about today is...
- A person that I am glad to have in my life is...
- Something I am looking forward to accomplishing is...
- I will work hard to accomplish... and as a result, I will feel...

Yoga Station

Print off cards or work with your physical education teacher to create cards with basic yoga poses and sequences that students can do in the classroom.

Physical Activity Station

Give students a selection of exercises that raise their heart rate: jump rope, hula-hoops, run in place, jumping jacks, high knees, etc. The physical education teacher may also have more ideas to incorporate.

CONCLUSION (5 MINUTES)

Exit Ticket



Ask students to review the strategies they tried and identify at least 1 they are willing to try when feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Ask students to name how they will remind themselves of this technique when they are feeling stressed.

Review key takeaways from the lesson and preview the next lesson.

Warm Up

- Create a reflection sheet where they can fill out these questions with multiple-choice options. Such as: Have you been doing your affirmation? How often? Have you been finding it difficult?

Main Activities

- Students could circle words that they would use to describe stress and how being stressed makes their bodies feel.
- Pictures of people or faces can also be used for students to connect facial or body expressions with stress.

Stress Stations

- Written directions could also include pictures and words to describe the instructions.
- Select stations that students are open to engaging in. Consider other stations such as a “joke station” where students read or tell jokes, a “conversation corner” where they can talk to a friend and catch up for a few minutes, or a “time management chart” where students could start to consider how they spend their time and map it out.

Exit Ticket

- Have students select strategies from a list and circle those they are willing to use or try.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



Connect to the nervous system and the brain; why we feel emotions in our bodies, the physical effects to our body systems when we are under stress (heart rate, breathing, sensation, etc.).

Seeking Help



OVERVIEW	
TIME	~50 minutes
FOCUS <i>Step of skill development model or functional info</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Functional information
MATERIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local resources, index cards, infographics
KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify when help is needed, available options and resources, and what happens when you ask for help.• Identify safe people (including peers and adults) in their lives.
SKILL OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss the barriers that could be involved in an advocacy effort (DPI 2011, Standard 8:3:A4).

Note: In the introduction, it was noted the importance of discussing resources for youth who may need support due to participating in this unit. The next 2 lessons may be triggers for students, so you should remind them of available resources should they need them, review the class norms around self-care and needing support, and should let the school counselor know that you will be teaching these lessons (you may even want to have them present in the classroom if possible).

INTRODUCTION (9 MINUTES)

Warm Up (4 minutes)

In the last lesson, students reviewed various stress management techniques and how stress can impact the mind, body, emotions, and behaviors. Name 2 people in your life who can help support you when you are stressed, and describe why you selected them. At least 1 should be a trusted adult.

Be Present: Mindful Moment (2 minutes)

Invite students to sit up tall in their seats, feet on the floor, hands in a comfortable position. Invite students to close their eyes or find a soft spot to focus. Begin by paying attention to their breath. Not trying to change it, just noticing where they feel their breath. Invite students to focus on a positive affirmation. Choose an affirmation to repeat and notice how it makes them feel. After 3-4 breaths focusing on the positive affirmation, invite a final big inhale and exhale.

Lesson Objectives (3 minutes)

Introduce the specific objectives for this lesson. Explain to students that we will be discussing when stress and our emotions become too big, and we need to seek support from others, including trusted adults. This is to avoid becoming overwhelmed and burnt out. We will also discuss resources both in the community and online to help gain the help and support we need.

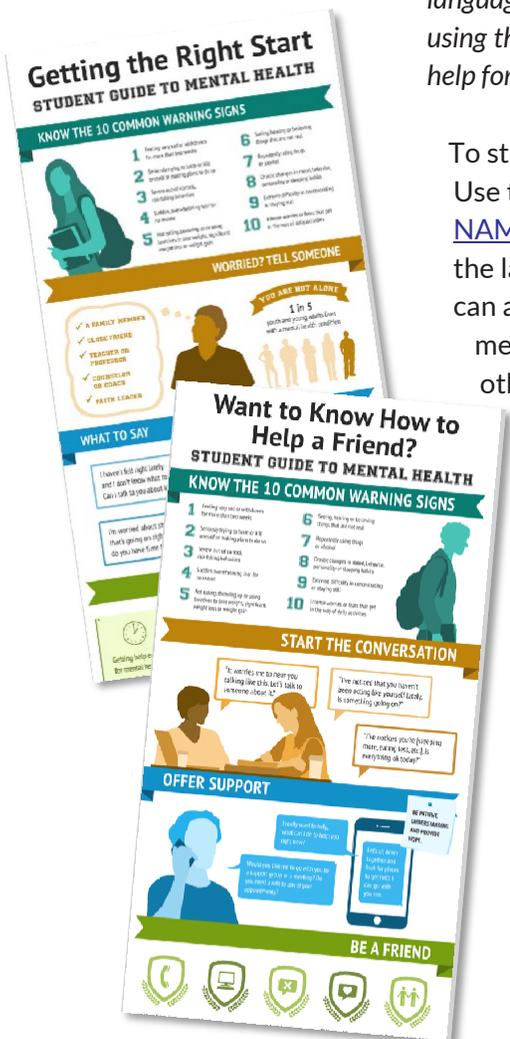
MAIN ACTIVITIES (40 MINUTES)

When Help is Needed (10 minutes)



Let students know that while you are encouraged to use strategies to manage and strengthen your mental health, sometimes feelings get too big to handle on our own. Whether you are a teen or an adult, there are times when we can't figure things out alone... and that is okay! We all have times where emotions get too big, and we need support from others. This is part of being human. It is important to recognize when how we are feeling is interrupting our lives. That could be a sign that we could use some help or support from someone we trust.

Note: Discuss the use of “warning signs” versus “signs”; many materials use the language of “warning signs” but that often makes us think something bad is coming; using the language of “signs” may help remove some of the stigmas around getting help for mental health.



To start, let's discuss some of the signs that indicate additional help is needed. Use the “[Getting the Right Start](#)” and “[How to Help a Friend](#)” infographic from [NAMI - Dane County](#) but be sure to discuss with students that they might see the language of “warning signs” as they do in this resource but one way that we can advocate for mental health and help to reduce some of the barriers around mental health is to change our language and maybe even advocate for others to change theirs as well!

Break students up into pairs or small groups and review this infographic focusing on the 4 sections after the “warning signs”.

Note: Remind students that while some resources still use the term “warning signs” we will continue to use the term “signs.”

Ask students to be prepared to share the following:

- At least 2-3 signs that may signal a need for help
- Examples of where and who to seek help from
- What to do if you notice a friend is exhibiting signs that indicate help might be needed



Whole Group Discussion: Ask students to report out on each of the questions. Pay special note to how to support a friend who is exhibiting signs that indicate help may be needed.

(National Alliance on Mental Illness 2015)

Resources Near Me! (10 minutes)

Ask students to raise their hand if they have ever asked an adult for help - for anything? (all hands should go up).

Emphasize for students that the same is true for mental health resources. We want to encourage young people to reach out and seek support if they are concerned for themselves or others. In fact, over 10,000 teens have used the National Youth Crisis Hotline. So, you are DEFINITELY not alone!

Let's take some time to explore local resources. Select 3-4 local community resources (make sure that you have 1 or 2 resources for each small group) that students may have access to and benefit from knowing about the services offered by these organizations. Put students into small groups and assign each group 1 resource. In their groups, each student will spend some time exploring the website or materials to better understand the services available in the local community and what to expect from a call or visit to the organization. Ask each student to write down some notes on what they reviewed. Then, discuss as a group to see what each person took away from the resource.

Once the small group has had a chance to discuss, have each group report their top 3-4 insights from the resources that will be important for their peers to know.

Note: If possible, work with your local community organizations to create a "what to expect" tip sheet for students to keep on hand. You may also wish to create a script that can be practiced with students similar to what they would hear if they called a crisis hotline. Your pupil services staff are an excellent resource to support the creation of this. You may also reach out to these resources in advance to inquire about whether or not students could call during class and speak to someone; this can be very helpful practice if it is possible. Make sure that students have access to all resources even though their group is only exploring 1 resource in depth. These are resources each student should be aware of.

National Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline/ Spanish (888) 628-9454
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline / Options for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (800) 799-4889
- National Youth Crisis Hotline (800) 442-HOPE (4673)
- Girls & Boys Town National Hotline (800) 448-3000
- Trevor Project LGBT Lifeline (866) 488-7386 / Text START to 678-678
- LGBT National Youth Talkline (800) 246-7743
- Trans Lifeline (877) 565-8860
- BlackLine: for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color / Call or Text (800) 604-5841
- National Eating Disorders Association Hotline (800) 931-2237

Wisconsin Resources

Find the crisis line for your county:

- [Prevent Suicide Wisconsin – County Crisis Lines](#)

Find mental health resources for your county:

- [Mental Health America of Wisconsin – Resources by County](#)

Wisconsin HopeLine (immediate emotional support)

- Text "HOPELINE" to 741-741

PRISM Peer Support Warmline

- (414) 336-7974
- prism@mhawisconsin.org
- Send a direct message on Facebook or Instagram

LGBTQ Anti-Violence Resource Line through Diverse & Resilient

- (414) 856-LGBT (5428)
- ipv.diverse@gmail.com

My Safe People - My Resources (Personal Reference Card) (10 minutes)

This exercise asks students to identify their “safe” or trusted adults. To start the activity, brainstorm a list, as a class, of people who might be considered safe adults. Write the list on the board. If not stated, include both school and community examples (e.g., teachers, elders, coaches).



Be sure to note that each student may look at this list a little different, and some people on the list feel “more safe” or “less safe” than others. That is okay, and this is personal to each person.

Provide each student with an index card. On the card, ask students to write down the names of 2 or 3 trusted adults and their phone numbers. Also, have them write down 2 or 3 resource numbers (of their choice).

On the back of the card, have students write or draw 3 or 4 strategies of self-care they can participate in when they are feeling stressed. Students may choose to decorate their cards to personalize them.

Alternate: You may also wish to incorporate the [Mental Health Crisis Card](#) from the Wisconsin Office of Children’s Mental Health.

Scenario and Debrief (10 minutes)

Read the scenario below to the class or have the class discuss it in small groups. Ask students to think about what tools and resources Jadyn could use in order to work through this issue. Use this as an opportunity to connect learning over the previous 3 lessons.

“Jadyn comes from a large family of overachievers. She has never been an “A” student and often compares herself to others. Over the last year her parents have been making her show them her homework after she’s finished it and sometimes there are big fights afterwards. Lately, when she goes to do her homework she feels sick, gets headaches, and sometimes feels really dizzy. Last week in school Jadyn got so nervous at the thought of having homework to show her parents that she almost passed out at school. She has noticed that her thoughts have all turned into worries. What should she do? How can Jadyn help herself?”

After reading the scenario, ask students to place themselves into Jadyn’s shoes. What would help them if they were in that situation? If time allows, ask students to share their idea with a partner who sits next to them prior to sharing with the whole class.

CONCLUSION (2 MINUTES)



Reinforce the message of the importance of "noticing skills" and the important role that students can play in helping to support a friend. Review key takeaways from the lesson and preview the next lesson.

DIFFERENTIATION AND MODIFICATIONS

Warm Up

- If students are struggling with the "why" questions, have them pick 2 or 3 people and name their relationship to the person (mom, dad, friend, teacher, etc.)

Main Activities:

- Have a printed list of potential "safe" or trusted adults.
- Reinforce for students that not all trusted or safe people are the same for each person. It is okay to select who is right for the student. If students have difficulty selecting a person, ask about teachers at school as this could even be you!
- Be sure to use local community resources that students are both familiar with and have access to. Consider bringing in professionals from local organizations to meet students and to answer questions they have.
- Modify the scenario to reflect other realities your students may be facing.
- Recognize that not all students have a trusted adult at home they can trust or talk to.
- Acknowledge this and encourage students to consider other adults in their life. Perhaps a teacher, coach, or mentor at an after-school activity.

EXTENSION
ACTIVITIES

Invite some trusted adults to participate in the lesson so that students can practice with an actual trusted adult (being mindful that the people that come might not be trusted adults for all students; students should not be forced to practice). Guests could include school or district support staff such as school counselors, social workers, psychologists, or nurses.



Have students research a local community organization or other online resource to learn more about it. Information can be brought back to class and shared while also discussing why the information and resource is valid and reliable (promoting connection to that skill).



Make a map of local community resources that can be visited or contacted. Ask students to identify the types of mental health services available for young people in your community or county.

Healthy Relationships & Mental Health



OVERVIEW	
TIME	~50 minutes
FOCUS <i>Step of skill development model or functional info</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Functional information
MATERIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Technology to present video clip
KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe healthy relationships
SKILL OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set effective boundaries

Note: In the introduction, it was noted the importance of discussing resources for youth who may need support as a result of participating in this unit. This lesson may be a trigger for students, so you should remind them of available resources should they need them, review the class norms around self-care or needing support, and should let the school counselor know that you will be teaching these lessons (you may even want to have them present in the classroom if possible).

The topic of healthy relationships is bigger than this one lesson. In fact, you may even choose to extend this lesson into a second class period to promote deeper conversations.

You are encouraged to consider how the topic of healthy relationships fits into other aspects of your curriculum (e.g., analyzing influences, interpersonal communication, etc.). Visit [Eau Claire Healthy Communities - Healthy Relationships Toolkit](#) for more information and resources to support curriculum development in this area. In addition, consider reaching out to the youth program at your local domestic violence or sexual assault agency. More information about Wisconsin agencies addressing domestic violence or sexual assault can be found on the [End Domestic Abuse WI website](#).

INTRODUCTION (9 MINUTES)

Warm Up (4 minutes)

As students enter, ask them to consider the behaviors that make them feel welcomed and loved in a relationship. Conversely, they can also write down behaviors that can be harmful in relationships.

Be Present: Mindful Moment (2 minutes)

Ask all students to stand up and have students do jumping jacks for 1 minute. If a student cannot do a full jumping jack, the exercise can be modified to move their body in a way that raises their heart rate for 1 minute. Following this, ask students to return to their seats and to sit in a comfortable position. Placing a hand on the heart, ask students to feel their heart beating while breathing normally. Have students sit in this position for 60-90 seconds to allow their heart rate to begin to slow and their breathing to return to normal. Ask students how it feels to feel their bodies slowing down and coming back to the center.

Lesson Objectives (3 minutes)

In this lesson, students will explore the topic of healthy relationships. While no relationship is perfect, this class discusses supportive behaviors and promotes connection versus behaviors that can be problematic or even dangerous within a relationship. In this instance, relationships are discussed both for the role they play in our connection to others along with their connections to personal mental health.

MAIN ACTIVITIES (40 MINUTES)

Growing Healthy Relationships (25 minutes)

Relationships are complex and can have a profound impact and influence on our mental health and well-being. Start by watching [What Makes a Healthy Relationship](#) (2:15) from AMAZE.org. Following the video, ask students to write three new things they learned (or were reminded of) about healthy relationships while watching the video. Discuss as a class.



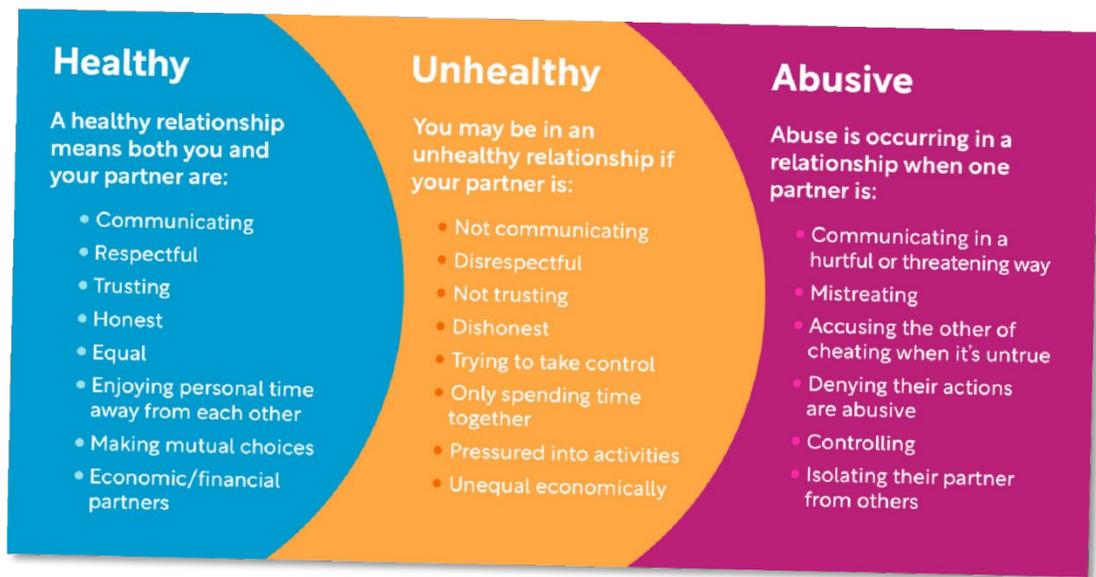
Place students into groups and give them the handout [Relationship Spectrum](#) from Loveisrespect.org.

As students are reviewing the handout, ask them to consider and be prepared to answer the following questions:

1. Name three characteristics of healthy relationships.
2. Name three characteristics of unhealthy relationships.
3. What are three signs that a relationship is considered abusive?
4. Why is this important to discuss related to mental health?

Discuss as a class. Questions during the debrief:

1. Ask students to describe any additional characteristics they may consider in the “healthy relationships” and “unhealthy relationships” categories.
2. When we talk about relationships, what relationships are we referring to? Be sure to note it is any relationship we have with another person, peer, or adult. The relationship may be with anyone in your life, such as friends, neighbors, classmates, relatives, or romantic partners - (make note that this includes both heterosexual and LGBTQIA+ relationships).



(Loveisrespect.org)

Setting Personal Boundaries (15 minutes)



Because the characteristics of healthy relationships affect ALL relationships, we have with others. Sometimes we will need to consider how to maintain boundaries to keep ourselves mentally and physically healthy. This is a form of self-advocacy. We set boundaries as a way to advocate for what we need and that which is important to us.

In small groups, assign each group of the following topic pages (physical boundaries, emotional boundaries, digital boundaries, or conflict resolution) to explore the LoveisRespect.org web page related to setting boundaries. As noted on the site, “a healthy boundary helps to protect and respect you – it doesn’t seek to control or harm someone else.” Each group will look at either: physical boundaries, emotional boundaries, digital boundaries, or conflict resolution. Consent is another consideration when we talk about boundaries. As you look through the materials, think about how being able to give consent supports personal boundaries.

During their review of the page, ask students to note:

1. Briefly describe what is meant by your topic (i.e., what are emotional boundaries?).
2. Describe 2-3 boundaries that are important to consider for this area.
3. How will setting boundaries be important to maintain healthy relationships? How about managing mental health?

After giving students time to work on their sections, come back together as a large group to discuss each of these areas.

CONCLUSION (2 MINUTES)



Ask students to complete an exit ticket where they tell you:

- One reason why boundaries are important in relationships
- One reason that healthy relationships are important for mental

health

Review key takeaways from the lesson and preview the next lesson.

Warm Up

- Provide students with visuals and have them sort them into behaviors that make them feel welcomed and behaviors that can be harmful.
- Give a list of different behaviors and have the students highlight in different colors that make them feel welcome and harmful behaviors.

Main Activities:

Healthy Relationships

- Make sure students have a chart or handout to fill in the answers to the questions

Personal Boundaries

- Consider creating a graphic organizer for students to fill in.
- If students do not have access to technology, consider printing out copies of handouts from either these pages or another source that lists out considerations for various boundaries. Students may also watch an additional video (e.g., AMAZE.org) or have a large group conversation.
- Utilize local resources, if you have a local community organization with printed materials, this would be a positive way to connect to the local community.
- Provide additional resource numbers and helpline information for resources related to relationship abuse and violence.

Exit Ticket

- Create a multiple-choice option for students to fill in or circle their responses.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



Consider strategies to continue the conversation and learning related to mental health and relationships in other skill units throughout the curriculum. Be sure to reference this unit throughout the course.



Talk with the ELA teacher about any text being read where characters have issues or concerns with relationships. Have students dissect character relationships and consider if the relationships would be considered healthy or unhealthy.

I CARE . . . about Mental Health

OVERVIEW	
TIME	~100 minutes (2 lessons at ~50 minutes each)
FOCUS <i>Step of skill development model or functional info</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment & Transfer (Step 5)
MATERIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materials needed to complete the performance task.
KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus is on applying knowledge acquired throughout the unit.
SKILL OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State a health-promoting position on a topic related to mental health and support it with accurate information (NHES 2007, Standard 8.8.1; DPI 2011, Standards 8:3:A3; 8:3:B3). • Demonstrate how to influence and support others to make health-promoting choices related to mental health (NHES 2007, Standard 8.8.2). • Work cooperatively to advocate for the health of individuals, families, and schools (NHES 2007, Standard 8.8.3). • Identify ways in which health messages and communication techniques can be altered for different audiences (NHES 2007, Standard 8.8.4; DPI 2011, Standard 8:3:B4). • I will work with friends, family, and community members to make our world fairer for everyone, and we will plan and coordinate our actions in order to achieve our goals (Learning for Justice 2018, Standard AC.6-8.20).

INTRODUCTION (9 MINUTES)

Warm Up (4 minutes)

As students enter, have the ICARE acronym up on the board. Ask students to write the acronym on a piece of paper and highlight key words. This will be used to support their development of the final assessment task.

Be Present: Mindful Moment (2 minutes)

Ask students to take a comfortable stance in their seats and to reflect upon all they have learned in this unit. Ask students to remember their positive affirmation and to silently repeat it to themselves while they take three slow deepbreaths.

Lesson Objectives (3 minutes)

As the final lesson(s) of the unit, students will be working on their performance task and integrate their learning from the entire unit into creating a message that will support young people in making choices that support and improve mental health.

If you add in Lesson 7, note that they will be presenting their advocacy project to the rest of the class in the next lesson.

MAIN ACTIVITIES (85 MINUTES)

Briefly review the skill cues for ICARE and then assign groups so students can complete the performance task for the unit.

SKILL CUES

- I – Identify and research a relevant and meaningful health issue
- C – Create a health-promoting position or relevant health message supported by facts and evidence that is geared to the audience
- A – Act passionately and with conviction
- R – Relay your health-promoting message to your audience
- E – Examine the effectiveness of the advocacy effort

I CARE ... About Mental Health



As middle schoolers, you know that sometimes it can be hard to share what you are feeling. You may also feel like you are the only one dealing with a particular problem, and it can feel really lonely. The good news is that you are never alone because there are other people and resources who can help you navigate what you are feeling and going through.

This project has your work as part of a team of students teaching others about ways to improve mental health, recognize signs that signal a need for support, and reminders of coping strategies when things get hard.

In groups of 2 or 3 students, you will select one of the topic areas below and create a visual way to educate and encourage actions that will support and improve young people's mental health.

Each advocacy project will:

- Educate about your specific mental health topic.
- Provide strategies (depending on the topic) that young people can use to improve or support their mental health.
- Encourage others to engage in a behavior that promotes, improves, maintains, or supports mental health.
- Provide resources to valid and reliable sources. Sources may educate others about your topic or serve as a resource for individuals who want to know more about your topic.

Select one of the following (ideally there are an equal number of groups for each):

- What to do when a person is struggling with their mental health
 - Provide 3-5 examples of resources a person can access and use when they are struggling with a mental health concern, such as a teacher, school counselor, text line, etc.
 - Give two reasons for each example of when this would be a good resource to access.
 - Select 1 of the resources and explain how it works. For example, if you select reaching out to a text line, include the number, what to expect when reaching out, and some reasons that this may be a positive choice for a young person.
- Using positive coping skills for mental health
 - Provide examples of 3-5 coping strategies and demonstrate how to use each strategy. Be sure that one strategy is positive self-talk.
 - Give examples of some reasons that each coping skill can help.
 - Discuss the connection between coping skills and regulating emotions.
- Recognizing when thoughts are troublesome and identify a safe person
 - Discuss 3-5 examples of thoughts that are typical in a stressful situation.
 - Discuss 3-5 examples of thoughts that may be a signal that further help is needed.
 - Give example characteristics of a person who is a safe person to talk to.
 - Discuss why some people may be better "safe people" than others.

Product: To present the information, each group can select how to present the material. This may include creating a poster or infographic, a short video demonstrating the techniques discussed in the presentation, or a podcast that walks others through the strategies and examples.

Advocacy Presentation (Additional Lesson)



Allow time for students to present their work to the class. This opportunity highlights both the work that each group did and solidifies learning as students see the material for an additional time.

As a group, come up with a response to all the reflection questions. Before the presentations, have all student projects around the room for all students to participate in a “gallery walk” to see and explore each groups’ work before having groups share out. It should be noted that not all group members need to be required to speak during the share-out.

Presentation

As each group presents, ask them to:

- Explain the topic of their advocacy efforts.
- Describe why this is important for middle school students.
- Discuss what they hope their classmates take away from their work.
- Highlight what would make their advocacy efforts easier or more difficult to implement.
- Explain how they might advocate for themselves if peers or family challenge their mental health.

Presentation Take-Aways

- As students listen to each presentation, ask them to note 1 or 2 pieces of information they find important.
- Notes must be unique to each presentation. By the end of all presentations, students will have noted multiple “key points” to remember from the presentations.

I Wonder...

After all presentations, ask students to think of 1 thing they still wonder about after going through this unit. Have students form small groups to discuss.

Use the group reports as a part of the conclusion to the unit.

CONCLUSION (15 MINUTES)



Discuss and highlight key takeaways from the unit and ask students to consider which specific strategies they will use outside the classroom.

Note: This conclusion is longer than usual to allow for a debrief in class and to finalize any questions students may have about mental health and advocacy.

ICARE ... About Mental Health

- Assessment may be modified to cross multiple lessons, include more or less technology (based on access), or incorporate additional local resources.
- Create an organizer for students to prepare answers to the questions, so they are prepared to respond during the presentation.
- This project can be completed in either a “low-tech” or “high-tech” format based on what is available at your school. If students are working remotely, you may ask them to work collaboratively using breakout rooms, or other tech tools, such as Google Classroom, for creating joint work.

**EXTENSION
ACTIVITIES**

Consider playing digital versions on school-wide television or placing posters and infographics in visible locations for other students to see.



Connect with the school nurse and school counselors to integrate work from health class into the language and messaging in their work.

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