



our minds
matter

teen center handbook

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our minds matter is a non-profit working toward a day when no teen dies by suicide.

Founded in 2012 as the Josh Anderson Foundation, at that time, a sole employee — founding Executive Director Lauren Anderson — started the organization in five schools in Fairfax County, VA, and named it for her brother, Josh, who died by suicide at the age of 17.

In the decade-plus since its founding, Our Minds Matter (OMM) has grown into a leader in peer-to-peer mental health programming for teens in the Washington, DC, metro area. Driven by research and led by teens themselves, OMM clubs create inclusive spaces where young people can drive the change they want to see in their school communities.



our protective factors

OMM recognizes that we are just one piece of the mental health puzzle. We are an upstream prevention program so we don't focus on crisis intervention, but instead on empowering teens to build the following evidence-based protective factors that improve mental wellness and reduce the risk of suicide.



social connectedness

A system of support is vital to maintaining our mental wellness because we can't always do it alone. OMM clubs will learn the importance of fostering relationships with friends, family, and even pets to lean on in times of struggle. OMM also encourages the community to be supportive and understand how to promote teen wellness.



self-care and healthy habits

How we take care of our bodies and minds affects how we feel. OMM clubs will experiment with techniques to reduce stress and maintain a positive self-image. The goal is for teens to be mindful of their current well-being, take time for self-care and to resort to healthy coping mechanisms when faced with challenges



prosocial skills

Equipping teens with skills to provide appropriate peer-to-peer support is essential since teens are likely to turn to one another for support. Additionally, engaging in prosocial behaviors has been proven to boost overall well-being. OMM club members will learn various skills to be able to support their peers, know when to get an adult for help and how to promote a culture of kindness in their community.



help-seeking

Mental health is just as important as physical health, yet teens often don't seek the help they need because of shame, stigma, fear of judgment and not knowing where to turn. OMM clubs aim to spread messages that encourage teens to seek help when stress or mental health challenges become overwhelming.

at teen & community centers

Since 2023, OMM has had a presence in teen and community centers in Fairfax County Virginia. Adapted from our evidence-informed school club model, the teen center program is molded to fit an out-of-school community setting and designed to be flexible so you can meet the needs of the teens at your center.

This handbook offers quick guidance on starting your club, planning meetings, following the roadmap curriculum, and accessing crisis and mental health resources. This is NOT a comprehensive gathering of all OMM resources and curriculum. We encourage you to visit our club portal at ourmindsmatter.org/club-portal/ to access our full catalog of **175+ mental health activities & campaigns** and more.

Your login information* is:

Username: NCS

Password: NCSMindsMatter25!

*space and case sensitive

stop!

Before going forward, have you taken the OMM Online Club Training yet?

Completing that training is the first step in getting your club started this year, and it covers everything in this handbook and then some! Take the training at: ourmindsmatter.org/club-training/tc/

need help?

Need help finding your login information for the club portal? Have questions not answered here or in the training? Email us at program@ourmindsmatter.org.

roles & expectations

what is our minds matter's role?

OMM's role is to provide all the materials you need to successfully run an OMM club at your center. This includes:

- A virtual self-paced training covering the OMM program basics, mental health 101, crisis protocol, mental health resources, and how to plan and facilitate an OMM meeting
- Access to our catalog of 175+ evidence-informed, teen-centric, and culturally responsive mental health activities
- An in-person kick-off training in August, 2026



what is your role as a club sponsor?

Your role is to run the program at your center and have a positive impact on teens! Each center will identify at least 2 staff members to serve as “Club Sponsors” for the OMM program, who will be primarily responsible for the successful implementation of the program. You may have additional directives from your agency or organization, but OMM's expectations are that club sponsors will:

- Provide an inclusive and welcoming space for OMM activities facilitated at teen & community centers
- Prepare and facilitate at least six OMM meetings throughout the year using OMM's curriculum
 - **The minimum number of meetings we recommend is 6.** However, at teen and community centers we have seen that two meetings per month offers a helpful level of consistency for participants.
 - Ultimately, you can choose a schedule that works best for your center!
- Advertise and promote the OMM program to encourage teen participation
- Serve as a trusted adult and connect teens with additional mental health support as needed
- Uphold OMM's value of diversity, equity, and inclusion (see below)



omm value statement

Our Minds Matter has a Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) values statement that we strive to uphold in all of our work. We also expect and encourage all of our programmatic partners, including NCS staff, to uphold these values as well to ensure a safe, welcoming, and warm environment for all young people we serve. Our full DEI statement is:

Pursuing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion is a moral imperative for Our Minds Matter, and integral to our work of empowering teens to improve their overall school culture around mental health so that no teen dies by suicide.

Our work affirms the inherent dignity of each person we work with while dismantling any inequities within our organization's policies, programs, and services, creating an environment where all can flourish and become one's best self. We are building a community whose members have diverse cultures, backgrounds, and life experiences. Vital to this is leadership and staff who are representative of the communities we serve, providing culturally competent and accessible curriculum and resources and constantly learning from and adapting to the communities we work with.

As an organization, we are committed to holding ourselves accountable to the lifelong learning and action that is required for effective diversity, equity, and inclusion. We are intentional with our official partnerships and act in solidarity with movements for historically marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous and People of Color, LGBTQ+ people, and people with disabilities.

Have questions about creating an inclusive space? Email us at
program@ourmindsmatter.org.

what does OMM look like?

omm guiding principles

Use the OMM guiding principles to establish expectations and a shared understanding of the purpose of an OMM meeting.

our minds matter is:

- A meeting to be open about struggles
- Mindful of privacy
- Raising awareness
- Sharing resources
- Practicing coping skills
- Promoting connection
- Creative problem solving
- Having fun!

our minds matter is NOT:

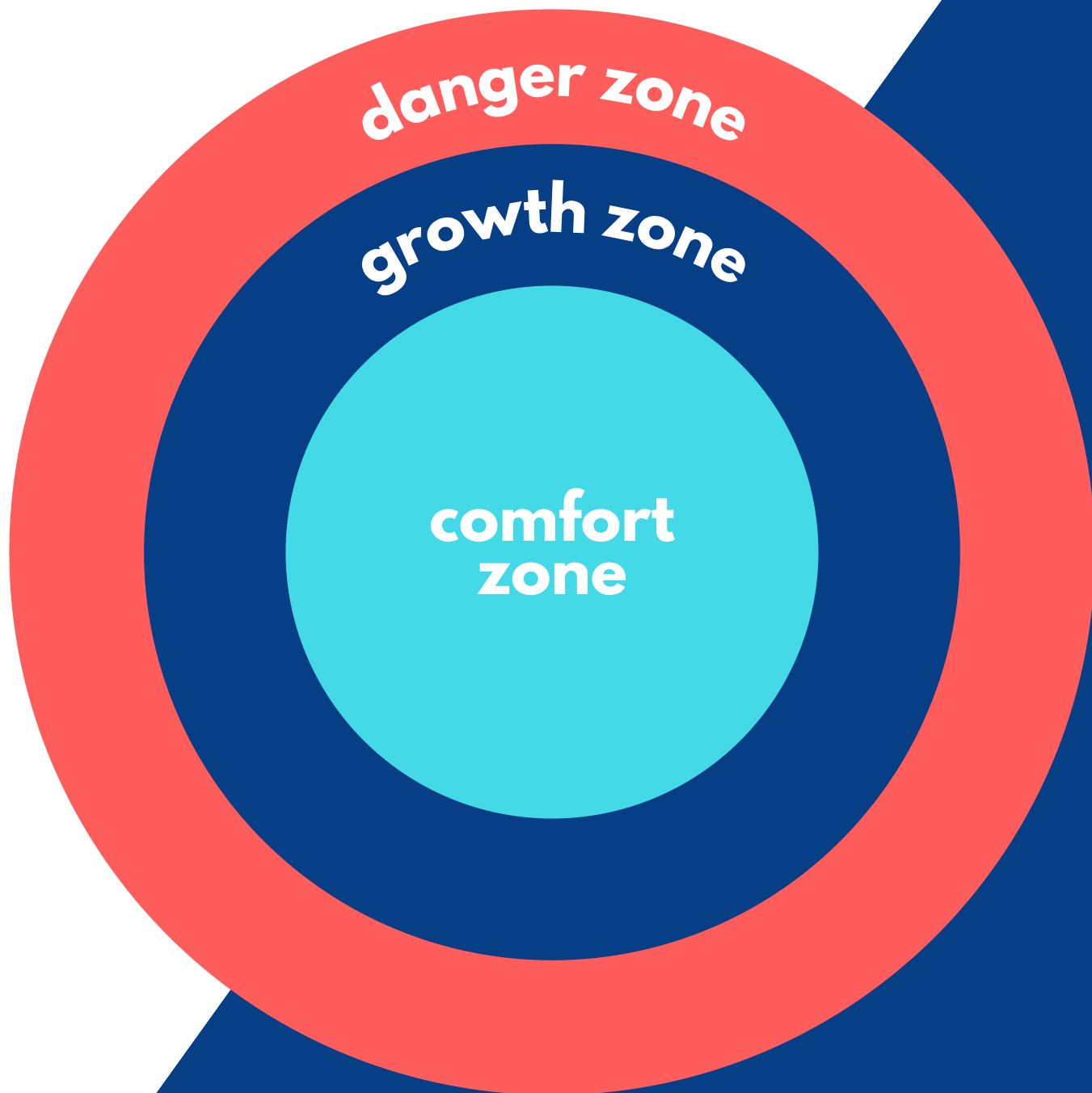
- Therapy, because that requires special training & privacy protected by law
- A classroom, because it's more personal than class. We are not referencing a text book, but we are connecting & growing together
- A meeting to deeply explore your personal symptoms. If you need a space for this, talk to a trusted adult

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mind your zones

We want folks to learn and grow during OMM meetings, but we don't want anyone to feel triggered or emotionally unsafe. Learn about minding your zones to be prepared for this!



Be aware of how you're feeling and only participate in what feels safe to you. In OMM club meetings, we never want anyone to be in their danger zone. If they are, get a club sponsor or trusted adult immediately.

mind your zones

what are the zones?

danger zone

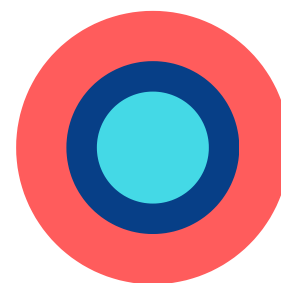
The danger zone is the area beyond your growth zone where challenges are overwhelming and potentially harmful. It's where stress, anxiety, and burnout can occur. You might feel triggered or unsafe, and this is a time when a club sponsor is needed. When someone is in the danger zone, they should be connected to support or resources right away or after the meeting.

growth zone

The growth zone is the area just outside of your comfort zone where you're challenged but not overwhelmed. It's that sweet spot where you're stretching your abilities and learning new things. The growth zone is a great place to be!

comfort zone

A comfort zone is a place where you feel safe and calm. It's a space where there's minimal risk and uncertainty. Think of it as a cozy, familiar place where you know what to expect.



club ground rules

you can add your own, but here are some to get you started!

1 self care first

Always put your mental health first during club meetings and opt out of what doesn't feel safe for you.

2 danger zone = get club sponsor

If you or someone else is struggling, get the club sponsor right away.

3 ouch, oops

It's ok to say how you feel if someone said something that doesn't sit right with you, and it's important to say you're sorry if you've said something that hurt someone.

4 growth zone is a good zone

Getting out of your comfort zone is how we learn and grow, so challenge yourself to get in the growth zone.

5 honor boundaries

Share only what you feel comfortable sharing, and never force anyone else to share.

6 expert on yourself, not others

You can only speak for yourself, so try not to assume how others may feel.

7 make space, take space

If someone often speaks a lot, remind them to let others have a turn. If someone is usually pretty quiet, encourage them to speak up.

8 respect & privacy

Keep what is said during a club meeting at the club meeting – unless someone needs mental health support, then get a trusted adult.

9 accessible & inclusive

Everyone has mental health, so OMM is for people of all identities, abilities, and backgrounds.

10 use omm meeting flow

For the best mental health outcomes, follow our flow.

club meeting flow

Consistency is key for teens, and following a flow for each meeting is also helpful for planning! We recommend that each OMM meeting looks something like this:



1

collect attendance

We recommend having all participants sign in at the start of every meeting so you can keep track of your members.

2

opening connection

Each club meeting begins with an opening connection which provides structure to club meetings, sets the tone, and allows folks time to connect and check in on how everyone is feeling. If you don't have a lot of time or you're feeling overwhelmed with planning, it's ok if this is all you do in a meeting!

3

activity

This is the heart of an OMM meeting. Activities are how teens connect and have fun while exploring mental health topics, and each one focuses on our protective factors: help-seeking, coping skills, prosocial skills, & social connectedness. Follow our club roadmap or take the visionary approach & check out our full club portal and choose any activities you'd like! And remember—you can adapt these activities to fit the needs of your club members.

4

mindful closing

This is a great way to end each meeting, so folks leave feeling grounded and ready to go about their day.

5

resources & announcements

Share information about upcoming meetings or events and include some mental health resources as folks are heading out at the end of your meeting. We encourage you to include local and center resources, and national resources like calling 988 for 24/7 support from the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, as well as texting "MIND" to 741741 for 24/7 support from Crisis Text Line.

planning a club meeting

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Planning a club meeting ahead of time can save you and your leadership team from a lot of stress! To make this easier on you, we recommend planning out your meetings at least a week in advance using our OMM meeting planning template. If you want to really get ahead of the game, you can plan out your meetings for an entire semester or year using our [calendar template](#)!

You can [download a blank template here](#) to print and fill out with your leadership team. And keep reading for more information on how to fill out each section!

section 1: determine goals

Identifying the goals for your next club meeting is a great place to start. What do you think club members need at this time? For example: Do you want to focus on coping skills and self-care, or prosocial skills and improving your community?

section 2: logistics

Determine the date, time, and location of the meeting.

section 3: select opening connection

Choose an opening connection that supports the goals of your meeting, or just focuses on folks getting to know each other better.

section 4: select an activity

Choose an activity that aligns with the goals you have set for this meeting. For example, if your goal is to focus on stress relief, you can use the filter tool on the club portal activity bank by filtering for self-care & healthy habits activities. Then, if needed, adapt the activity to fit your timeframe or needs.

**Want to make selecting an activity even easier?
Just follow our Club Roadmap!**

club meeting planning template

1 meeting goals:

2 date:
time:
location:

3 opening connection:

4 activity:

5 mindful closing:

6 who will...

- Gather supplies needed: _____
- Make sure everyone signs in using the sign-in form: _____
- Clean up after the meeting: _____
- Advertise the meeting: _____
- Facilitate the opening connection: _____
- Facilitate the activity: _____
- Facilitate the mindful closing: _____
- Prepare the custom slide deck (if using, not required): _____
- Share out mental health resources & upcoming events: _____
- Bring snacks (if providing, not required): _____

7 we'll advertise the meeting by...

- ☐ Hang up fliers
- ☐ Send an email out to previous attendees
- ☐ Share meeting details on the morning announcements or news
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Share on club, school, or personal social media

section 5: select mindful closing

Choose a mindful closing that relates to the meeting theme or goal, or just allows folks to reset before going about their day. This is a time to practice breathwork, grounding, and mindfulness.

section 6: delegate roles

Determine who will accomplish each task.

section 7: promote the meeting

About a week before the meeting, share the details with all current and potential members so no one misses out! Check off how you'll promote your meetings (and add in your own if you'd like!)

reminder:

Don't have a lot of time to plan your next meeting? Even just facilitating an opening connection with peers can make a club meeting impactful and fun! It's OK if you don't take all of these actions—when in doubt, keep it simple!

meeting facilitation tips

Group facilitation is a skill- and we're here to give you some simple but effective tips on how to grow that skill!

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Active listening means giving your full attention to understand both what's said and how it's said.

As a facilitator, model this skill to help everyone feel heard.

Use eye contact, open body language, clarifying questions, and briefly summarize what they've shared to show you're truly listening.

Affirming and Validating - Validating means making participants feel heard and respected—even if you don't fully understand their experience. You don't have to agree; just acknowledge their right to share and feel how they feel

As a facilitator, you can create an affirming space by thanking people for sharing, listening with empathy, and using validating phrases. Try out the following phrases:

"I hear you,"

"I am here to support you."

"I am grateful that you shared your experience and I am with you".

"You are not wrong or bad for feeling that way,"

"How you feel is how you feel, and that's ok,"

"You're not alone in this, how can we support you?"



Remember, your role is to foster connection and support—not to fix. If someone needs more help, refer to the Mental Health Resources section.



Make space, take space means that everyone present at the meeting deserves a chance to be heard. So if a teen is someone who often speaks a lot, thank them and then steer the conversation to make sure others have a chance to participate. If a teen is someone who tends to sit back and listen, invite them into the conversation by gently encouraging their participation. You never want to force someone to share or cut someone off, but as a facilitator, you can do your part to make sure everyone has a chance to take up space.

Encourage fun! Remember that the goal of these activities is to bring some interactivity and fun into mental health topics, so don't lose sight of that! Invite folks to chat amongst their small groups or with their neighbor, get up and move around when it makes sense, and participate to the fullest. Some other simple ways to make the space fun:

- Mix it up when folks are sharing aloud by having them "popcorn" or toss a ball to the next person
- Play music during activity time
- Take your meeting outside if it's nice out, or have it on the basketball court if folks want to move around
- Walk around and engage with folks as they're working and be warm and inviting as you facilitate!



tips for teen engagement

Read on for quick & simple strategies to boost teen participation, engagement, and impact for your center's OMM meetings

advertise your club's meeting dates

- try to keep a consistent schedule so teens know when to be there
- create custom flyers to share with teens, parents, and the community
- have multiple communication styles (word of mouth, flyers, emails, etc.)

share success stories

- highlight success stories from teens who have participated in the program (with their permission) via word of mouth, email communications, or custom flyers around the center

incentivize the program

- pass out light snacks or treats during each session
- give out quarterly incentives for teens who have attended a certain amount of sessions such as:
 - pizza party
 - VIP time in the gym or on the computers
 - small prizes

teen involvement

- allow teens to feel more involved in the program by having them select activities, read out instructions, help with set up/clean up, and facilitate an opening connection or mindful closing. Offer incentives for teens who do this to make it even more exciting for them!

collaborative planning

- incorporate OMM programming into other programs at the center in a non-traditional way—something is better than nothing!
 - if the teens are cooking perhaps have them engage in an opening connection while also participating in the cooking session
 - have students do a mindful closing that focuses on breathing before/after doing a sports activity

tabling

- set up a table at community events to advertise the club
- try to have an interactive activity (OMM is happy to offer activities)
- have snacks or candy on the table

teen mental health

About 1 in 5 teens experience a diagnosable mental health disorder. While teen challenges are often dismissed as "normal angst," research shows that half of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14. **You can support the teens in your life by understanding the pressures they face and recognizing signs of struggle.**

Some common stressors that teens face which may negatively affect their mental health include:

- Academic-related stress & pressure to succeed
- Juggling multiple responsibilities at home, school, and work
- Having problems with friends, bullying, or peer pressures
- Transitions such as moving, changing schools
- Body image concerns
- Parental conflict or separation
- Financial stress in the family
- Living in an unsafe home
- Social media - problematic use

Noticing Signs of a Mental Health Challenge or Concern

Everyone has mental health, and while not everyone will have a mental health disorder or experience a crisis in their lifetime, most of us will have some kind of mental health challenge or concern at some point. So while they may not be in immediate crisis, **it's still important to check in if you notice any of these signs:**

- Becomes increasingly isolated, unkempt, irritable, or disconnected
- Cries often or shows signs of hopelessness or helplessness
- Seems tired or has no energy all the time
- Acts angrily or irritable most of the time
- Seems socially withdrawn
- Has trouble sleeping or sleeps too much
- Seems overly worried
- Shows significant changes in appetite
- Shows signs of distress around food and/or their body
- Shows significant and marked changes in behavior and mood
- Uses drugs or alcohol excessively
- Remains distressed following repeated attempts by you and others to be helpful



showing up when it matters most

So what do you do if you notice a teen is struggling? Here are some tips on how to show up when it matters most:



listen well

Listen carefully when the person is describing what it is like to be them and try to imagine being in their position. Let them know that you care. Don't try to talk the person out of their feelings; it can be very healing to have someone just listen, understand, and validate, even when the feelings are very painful. This is a great time to practice active listening.



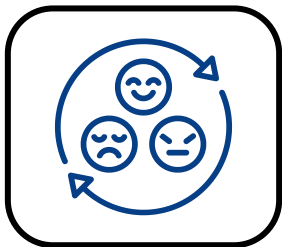
avoid giving advice

While you naturally want to help someone who is struggling, a listening ear is typically much more helpful to people in distress than suggestions about how to make the distress go away.



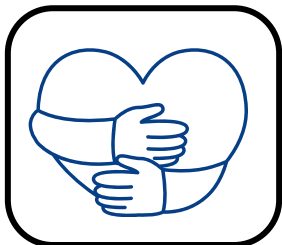
avoid making judgments

When a teen confides in you, it's usually most helpful for them to just feel understood, even if you disagree with what they are saying. This is a perfect time to use your affirming and validating skills.



let them feel their feelings

Allow someone who is very upset or crying to continue to vent their feelings until they naturally feel ready to calm down. Supporting them through their emotional release will be much more helpful to them than trying to shut them down before they are ready.



thank them for being brave and show you care

Sometimes, people just need to talk and feel heard, but this can be really scary. Make sure they know that it was brave of them to open up, and that you're there for them. Follow up with them the next time you see them to check back in.



encourage them to get additional help

You can be there for a teen, but there are often limits to what you can do. If you feel that the person's problem requires more help than you can provide, encourage them to seek additional support. You might ask them if you can talk to their guardians with them, or connect them with another mental health resource (as listed in the "Mental Health Resources" section of this handbook).

responding to a mental health crisis

Almost everyone will face a mental health challenge or concern at some point, and some people will also deal with mental health crises as well.

Suicide is a national health crisis and it's one of the leading causes of death in teens. As a trusted adult to teens, understanding how to identify when someone is at risk for suicide is crucial. Read on for some common warning signs and risk factors for teen suicide

noticing signs of a mental health crisis

- Talking about wanting to die
- Great guilt or shame
- Being a burden to others
- Empty, hopeless, trapped or having no reason to live
- Extremely sad, more anxious, or full of rage
- Unbearable emotional or physical pain
- Making a plan or researching ways to die
- Withdrawing from friends, saying goodbye, giving away important items, or making a will
- Taking dangerous risks such as driving extremely fast
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Eating or sleeping more or less
- Using drugs or alcohol more often
- Romanticizing death and/or suicide
- Disregarding planning for the future

if a teen is in crisis

- Notify another staff member immediately so one person can stay with the group and the other with the person in crisis.
- Gently escort the participant out of the room and somewhere quiet — never leave them alone.
- Use the Dos and Don'ts below, along with the Crisis Protocol decision tree, to help guide your next steps.

do

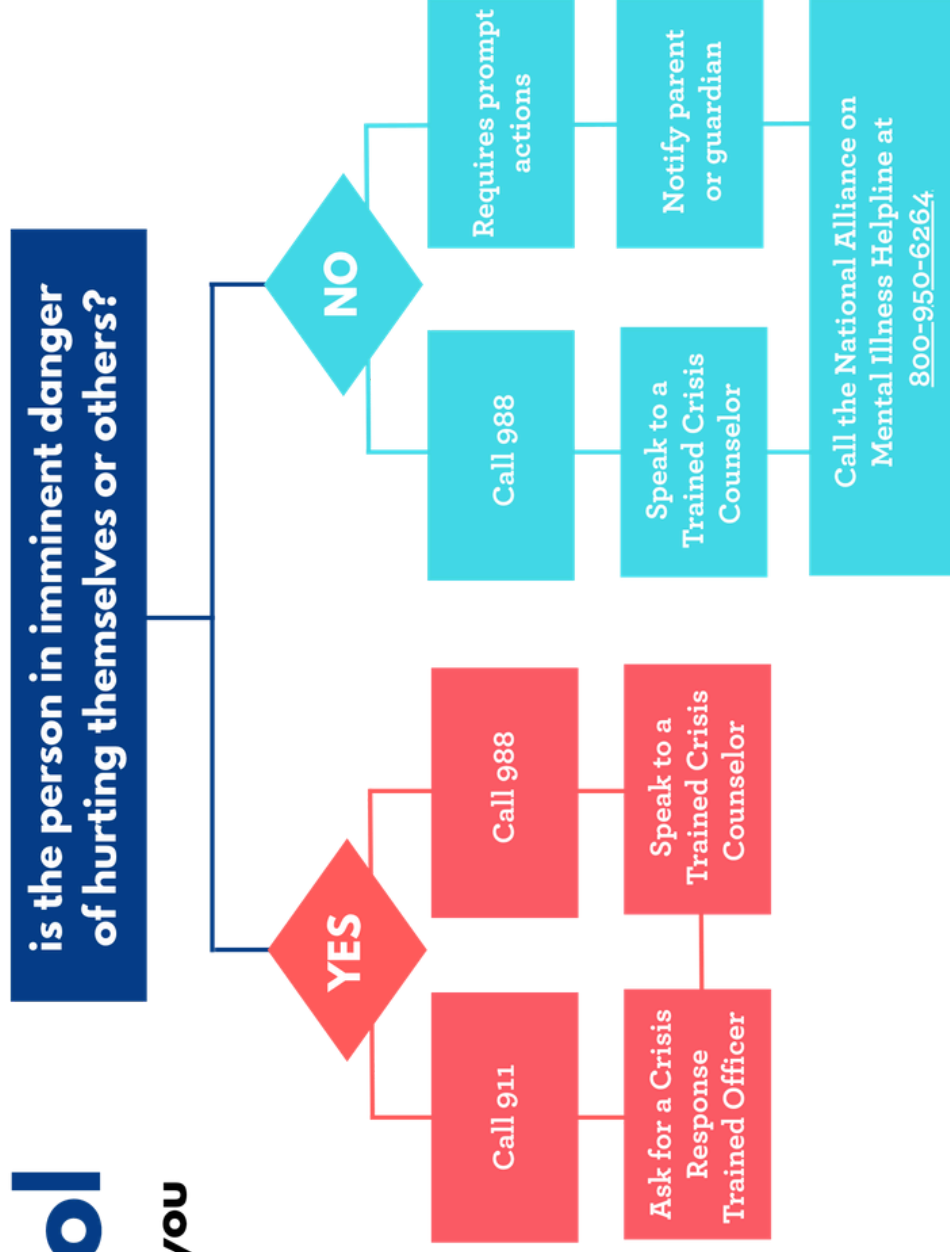
- Keep your voice calm and be patient
- Express support and concern
- Ask how you can help in the moment
- Offer choices

don't

- Overreact or panic
- Take control away from a teen
- Touch a teen without permission
- Leave them unsupervised

crisis protocol

what to do when they need you



mental health resources

remember, the following warning signs of suicide demand immediate attention:

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself.
- Talking or writing about suicide or death.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Talking about being a burden to others and how the world would be better off without him/her.
- Talking about being trapped or in unbearable pain.
- Complete withdrawal.
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge.
- Displaying extreme mood swings and acting recklessly.
- Looking for ways to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining access to firearms, pills, or other means to kill oneself.
- Giving away prized possessions and other personal things; tying up loose ends.

For our full list of mental health resources and printable handouts, go to ourmindsmatter.org/resources/

for crisis or immediate assistance:

- Crisis Text Line
 - Text MIND to 741741
- Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
 - Call 988
- The Trevor Project – LGBTQ+ Crisis Hotline
 - Call 1-866-488-738
- Text with a trained Hope Coach at TheHopeLine.com

for folks who aren't in immediate crisis but still need support, check out some ways to find help:

- Teen Line: Teens helping teens in online chats
- Find a Therapist: Search Psychology Today to find a professional to see in your area.
- Start Your Recovery: Learn about drug and alcohol problems and options for treatment and recovery
- Detox Local: Find a drug & alcohol detox location near you & start your recovery journey safely
- National Alliance for Eating Disorders: Call 866-662-1235 9-5:30 Monday-Friday to speak with a licensed therapist specialized in eating disorders. Outside of hotline hours, check out their FindEDHelp tool to get connected to support as soon as possible.
- Kids Mental Health Foundation: Find children/teen mental health resources in your state

remember to check out our [club portal](#) for
all of our curriculum and resources!

omm club roadmap

fall recommended activities:



- * **The Power of Music**: Identify and express emotions through music by creating mood playlists
- * **Lighten the Load**: Find strength in sharing your struggles with others
- * **Celebrating All of Me**: create self-portraits to showcase all aspects of your identity

winter recommended activities:



- * **My Own Emoji**: create emojis that make everyone feel seen
- * **We All Feel**: explore the intersection of gender & mental health
- * **Red Flag, Green Flag**: explore healthy & unhealthy relationships

spring recommended activities:



- * **Line of Privilege**: learn how privilege and oppression impact mental health
- * **Social Media is Lying to You**: discuss social media, the pitfalls of comparison, and mental health
- * **Heal from Stress**: design your own band-aids with coping skills for stress

Access the entire catalog of 175+ engaging activities through OMM's club portal. Use your club portal login to access everything you need:

Username: NCS

Password: NCSMindsMatter25!

*case and space sensitive

For a simpler approach, you can use this club roadmap and follow our recommended activities

the power of music

Identify & express emotions through music by creating mood playlists



supplies:

- [Feelings Wheel](#) (printable)
- [Slide deck](#)
- High tech: computer or phone with access to music
- Low tech: paper & writing utensils

instructions:

- Look at the Feelings Wheel (on slide or handout).
- Pick 2-3 words that describe how you're feeling right now.
- Chat with a partner or share with the group (if you're comfortable).
- Follow along with the slides to learn:
- We all feel a huge range of emotions - some feel good, some don't.
- When we ignore our feelings or bottle them up, it can mess with our mental health.
- One healthy way to deal with emotions? Music.
- Get into small groups. Each group picks one emotion (like hyped, calm, stressed, or sad).
- Now make a playlist that matches that vibe.
- High-tech: Use Spotify, YouTube or your favorite app to build the list.
- Low-tech: Write down the song names and artists on paper.
- Each group shares a few songs and explains why they match the feeling. If you can, play a track for everyone.

goals:

- Help you notice how you're feeling
- Learn why expressing emotions in healthy ways matters
- Use music as a tool to match or shift your mood

discussion:

- Why is it helpful to know how we're feeling?
- What happens if we don't deal with our emotions?
- How can music change or match your mood?
- What are other healthy ways to handle emotions?

other tips/resources:

- Try mixing music genres - old, new, fast, slow.
- Want to go big? Share your playlists with your center (like on socials).
- Remember: music is personal. Be curious and respectful of everyone's taste.
- [How music can improve your mental health](#)

lighten the load

Find strength in sharing your struggles with others



supplies:

- A backpack or bag
- Heavy objects (textbooks, water bottles, laptops, etc.)
- Notecards and pens

goals:

- Remind everyone that we all go through tough stuff - and that we're not alone
- Practice how to ask for help in a chill, no-pressure way
- See how opening up to friends can actually make things easier instead of trying to deal with it all solo

instructions:

- Start by asking: *"Have you ever carried a really heavy backpack all day? How did it feel?"* Discuss how struggles in life can feel like that - heavy, draining, and hard to carry on your own.
- Give each student a notecard and ask them to write down one common thing teens struggle with. It could be stuff like stress about grades, drama with friends, family problems, or mental health stuff. It doesn't have to be super personal - just general ones.
- Go around in a circle. Anyone who wants to can share what they wrote. As each person shares, place a heavy item in a backpack to represent that struggle. (People can pass if they'd rather not speak)
- Ask for a volunteer to try carrying the backpack across the room.
- Ask: *"How does that feel?"*
- Let others try too, if they want, just to feel how heavy it is.
- Now tell the volunteer: *"It's time to ask for help. You don't have to do this alone."* If they're not sure what to say, offer phrases like:
 - *"Can someone help me?"*
 - *"I don't think I can do this alone."*
 - *"I need help."*
- When they ask, let others step in. Each helper takes one item out of the backpack and says something supportive like:
 - *"I got you."*
 - *"You're not alone."*
 - *"I can help with this."*
- Keep going until the backpack is lighter and more people are carrying the weight. Then walk together across the room - everyone with a little piece of the load.
- Wrap up message: Everyone carries struggles, but when we ask for help, others can step in and lighten the load. Asking for help isn't putting a burden on someone else - it's how we get through life together.

lighten the load

Find strength in sharing your struggles with others



discussion:

- How did it feel to carry everything alone?
- How did it feel to ask for help? Why can this be difficult sometimes?
- How did it feel when carrying the weights together?
- How does this connect to real life? Can you name an example of a time you needed to ask for help and let someone carry the weight with you?
- What are ways we can help each other when things feel emotionally heavy?

facilitator notes:

- If you have a really large group, you can split them in two and have both groups work through this activity simultaneously.
- Try to make sure that there are enough weights for all students to volunteer to do the work together. If there are more students than weights, the remaining students can simply offer verbal support.
- Similarly, if someone is not physically able to carry one of the objects or move across the room, they can offer verbal support and cheer the group on.

celebrating all of me

Create self-portraits to showcase all aspects of your identity



supplies:

- [Slide deck](#)
- Paper
- Art supplies
- Important: use crayons/markers that include the entire range of skin tones so everyone can draw themselves accurately

goals:

- Explore racial, cultural, and ethnic identities
- Learn that celebrating everyone's racial, cultural, and ethnic identity promotes positive mental health for all
- Discuss how people who experience oppression through discrimination, stigma and mistreatment related to race, culture, or ethnicity may experience emotional struggles

instructions:

- Invite students to consider the identities of ethnicity, race, and culture.
- Ask students to reflect on the following:
 - In what ways are your identities visible or invisible to others?
 - In what ways are your identities celebrated or not celebrated at school and in the community?
- Ask student to create a “Celebrating All of Me” self-portrait and use the slide deck to show examples. Ask students what they notice about the examples and images that stand out which may represent symbols of identity (e.g., rainbow flag, cross, etc.).
- Guide students through the directions using the animated steps in the slide deck:
 - Step 1: Draw your head and then draw a line down the middle of the portrait.
 - Step 2: Draw one side that looks like what you see in the mirror or what friends/classmates see when they look at you.
 - Step 3: Draw the other side with the most important parts of your identity that others cannot see from looking at you. This could include culture, ethnicity, other identities (i.e., gender identity, sexuality, religion, geographic location) or other important parts of yourself (e.g., feelings, interests, favorite activities).
 - Step 4: Invite students to post their pictures in the classroom/space and let students do a gallery walk, or have students stand up and talk about their self-portraits before the group (time permitting).

celebrating all of me

Create self-portraits to showcase all aspects of your identity



discussion:

- What did you learn about your own race, ethnicity, and culture?
- What did you learn about your friends' race, ethnicity, and cultural identity?
- What did it feel like to share the non-visible portion of your identity?
- What did it feel like to see the non-visible portion of your friends' identities?
- How does discussing and sharing your race, ethnicity, and cultural identity impact your mental health?
- How does oppression relate to race, ethnicity, and cultural identities? To mental health?
- What can our OMM club do to celebrate everyone's race, ethnicity, and culture in this club?
- What can our OMM club do to celebrate everyone's race, ethnicity, and culture in our centers?

other tips/resources:

- Keep in mind that it's important to make the connection between mental health and oppression related to racial/cultural identities. For more information, read [this](#).
- Let students know they only have to draw/share what they are comfortable sharing about themselves.
- Students may need ideas to represent their culture or ethnicity. You may share ideas such as the flag from a family's country of origin or a cultural symbol or image that reminds them of their family/culture.

center -wide adaptation:

- For a center -wide impact, hang the self-portraits on display within the center or share them on the club's social media page (with the student's permission).

my own emoji

Create emojis that make everyone feel seen



supplies:

- [Slide deck](#) (with examples of emojis)
- Paper
- Art supplies
- [NPR article](#)

instructions:

- Share with students that emojis can express different things, including aspects of identity
- Share the above story of O'Plerou Grebet, a digital artist from the Ivory Coast featured in the news because he created emojis to reflect life in contemporary West Africa and share important aspects of his identity
- You can print the article for students or summarize it
- Invite students to brainstorm essential aspects of their identity (race, ethnicity, culture) and reflect on whether those identities are currently available in emojis
- They will then create a list of new emojis they can make together or individually
- Club members can work together or individually to design one or more new emojis on paper or the computer.

goals:

- Share and celebrate their racial, cultural, and ethnic identities
- Explore how representation matters and connects to feelings of acceptance and belonging, which are important for positive mental health for all

discussion:

- Why does representing various racial, cultural, and ethnic identities matter in emojis? How does this relate to mental health?
- Are the identities important to you represented in emojis? Why or why not?
- What new emojis would you suggest be created so people could better describe mental health?

other tips/resources:

- Students can submit emojis to the Unicode Consortium using this [Emoji Proposal form](#).

center -wide adaptation:

- For a wider impact, sponsor a contest for new emoji designs around the center .

we all feel

Explore the connection between gender & mental health



supplies:

- Masking tape, painter's tape, or yarn
- Space to move around

goals:

- Identify how different genders tend to show their emotions and ask for help
- Explore how society judges people for showing certain feelings based on gender roles and culture
- Challenge toxic masculinity and learn ways everyone - especially guys and people who identify as masculine - can express their emotions and ask for help in healthy ways

instructions:

- Prep:
 - Before you start, use masking tape, painter's tape, or yarn to make a line on the floor about 10 feet long. Label one end "Uncomfortable" and the other "Comfortable."
- Intro:
 - Let's talk about emotions - and how we show them. Everyone feels things like sadness, fear, or stress, but not everyone feels safe showing these emotions.
 - A lot of guys or men feel pressure to "man up" and hide what they're feeling. Many think they're supposed to bottle it up and not ask for help - even when they're struggling. This can lead to serious stuff like depression, substance use, or even suicide.
 - Teen girls face different pressures. They're often told how to look or act, and when they do speak up, they might be called "too emotional" or "dramatic." Because of this, their mental health issues sometimes get ignored - even though many deal with things like anxiety, trauma, or eating disorders.
 - Trans and nonbinary youth also deal with big challenges. They're more likely to face discrimination and feel misunderstood - and that takes a toll. They're much more at risk for depression and suicide, especially if they don't have support.
 - All of this can also be impacted by other parts of our identities, like race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and so much more.
 - So today, we're going to check in with ourselves - and each other - about how we show emotions and how safe it feels to express them.

we all feel

Explore the connection between gender & mental health



instructions:

- Here's how it works:
 - The facilitator will say a feeling out loud. Participants will then move along the line to show how *comfortable* or *uncomfortable* they feel expressing that feeling to a close friend or trusted adult. There's no right or wrong answer - encourage folks to just be real with themselves
- Read off the following emotions one at a time and allow folks to move to a spot that feels right for them. Add in others if you'd like!
 - Anger, Jealousy, Confidence, Confusion, Joy, Fear, Anxiety, Embarrassment, Pain, Sadness, Hopelessness, Affection, Boredom, Loneliness, and Guilt

discussion:

- What stood out to you during the activity? Anything surprise you?
- Which emotions were easiest for you to share? Which ones felt harder to show?
- What kinds of messages have you heard (from family, media, or community) about what it means to be "tough" or "emotional"?
 - For example: "boys don't cry," "girls are too sensitive," "act like a man," "stay strong no matter what"
 - "Machismo" in Latino/a/e culture, the "strong Black women" stereotype, "emotional stoicism" in Asian culture
- How do you think those messages affect how easy or hard it is to open up or ask for help?
- What can happen if someone keeps pushing their feelings down instead of talking about them? How might that affect their mental health or relationships?
- What's one thing you could try when you're feeling low or overwhelmed to help express how you're feeling in a healthy way?
- If it doesn't come up naturally, here are the key takeaways:
 - Every feeling is valid.
 - Emotions are your body's way of responding to the world around you.
 - Feeling something doesn't make you weak - it makes you human.
 - Give yourself permission to feel.
 - Give others that same space, too.

red flag, green flag

Explore what makes a relationship healthy vs. unhealthy



supplies:

- A/V Equipment
- “Because I Love You” video
- #LoveBetter Video
- 10 Signs of an unhealthy relationship & a healthy relationship
- Pens or markers & sticky notes

goals:

- Identify the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, or red and green flags
- Provide resources if someone believes they may be in an unhealthy relationship

instructions:

- Pass out paper and writing utensils and give everyone 3 minutes to independently write down their response to the prompt: “What makes a relationship healthy? You can think about romantic relationships or friendships.”
- Give the group the opportunity to share what they wrote with a partner for 2-3 minutes.
- Let everyone know that you’re going to play a couple of short videos that show some signs of an unhealthy relationship. If anyone feels triggered by this, they can take a break outside of the room and talk to the club sponsor for support.
- Play the Because I Love You video and pause for 1-2 minutes for quick reactions.
- Then play the #LoveBetter video and pause for 1-2 minutes for quick reactions.
- After the group shares their initial reactions, ask the following questions:
 - What does it mean when someone says something is a “red flag”?
 - Facilitator note: a red flag in a relationship or person is typically a sign that they are behaving in an unhealthy or even potentially abusive way. A red flag is a sign that this person might not be a good partner or friend.
 - What does it mean when someone says something is an “ick”?
 - Facilitator note: an “ick” is something that personally just turns someone off from another person, which is different from a “red flag.” It’s important to differentiate between the two.
 - What does it mean when someone says something is a “green flag”?
 - Facilitator note: a green flag is something in a relationship or person that is a sign of healthy, caring, and loving behavior. A green flag is a sign that the person would be a good partner or friend.
- Next, encourage everyone to write down 3 “red flags” that they’re going to look out for in a friendship or relationship and 3 “green flags” on their sticky notes (bonus points if you have red and green markers to write with!).
- Once everyone has written down their “red flags” and “green flags,” have them stick their “red flags” on the red flag wall and “green flags” on the green flag wall.

red flag, green flag

Explore what makes a relationship healthy vs. unhealthy



instructions:

- Note: You might hear people bring up the term “beige flag” because it’s popular on TikTok. While it’s not really an important part of the conversation around healthy vs. unhealthy relationships, it’s good to be aware of it!
 - A beige flag refers to a behavior that is neither good nor bad, but notable or quirky or interesting. It’s often used as a way to lovingly tease a partner about a special interest or hobby.
 - Read more [here](#).

discussion:

- What resonated with you from the video? What didn’t?
- What do you recognize as a “red flag” in a relationship? What about a “green flag?”
 - As the facilitator, use [the signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships](#) to move the conversation along if you don’t see them represented in the sticky notes
- Were you surprised by what anyone wrote? Is there anything in either category that you don’t think fits?
 - I.e. is a red flag actually just an ick, or is a green flag actually maybe closer to a red flag?
- What can you do if you notice red flags in your partner or a friend’s partner? What can you do if you notice them in yourself?
 - Hint: reach out to a trusted adult, use [One Love Foundation](#) or [Love Is Respect](#) resources
- Where would you go if you needed to speak to a trusted adult about a relationship?
- What “green flags” will you be looking for now in partners or friends? What “green flags” will you try to exhibit yourself to be a healthy, safe partner?

other tips/resources:

- [Relationship Spectrum chart](#)
- [One Love Foundation](#) for more information about healthy vs unhealthy relationships
- [loveisrespect.org](#) for more information about dating, signs of abuse, creating safety plan, etc.
- Text ‘LOVEIS’ to 22522

Thank you to the One Love Foundation for their videos & resources

line of privilege

Learn how privilege and oppression impact mental health



supplies:

- [Slide deck](#)
- Scrap paper to recycle
- Recycling bin/trash can
- Prizes (club swag, stickers, candy, etc.)

goals:

- Understand that everyone has different identities and life experiences
- Learn how some people face extra challenges that can affect their mental health

instructions:

- Place a recycling bin or box at the front of the room.
- Have students line up in order of their birth month (January in the front, December in the back).
- The Game:
 - Give each student a piece of scrap paper to crumple into a ball.
 - Say, “The recycling bin represents opportunities like doing well in center , getting a good job, or staying healthy.”
 - On the count of **1...2...3**, students try to throw their paper ball into the bin.
 - If they make it, they win a small prize (like a sticker or treat).
- Ask students to sit down for a reflection using the slide deck.
- Explain that where they stood in line represents privilege or oppression. For example:
 - People closer to the bin had an easier time making their shot.
 - People farther away faced more challenges.
- In small groups (3–5 students), list examples of:
 - **Privileges** (advantages): Things that make it easier to succeed, like having money, being white, or being able to walk easily.
 - **Oppression** (disadvantages): Things that make it harder, like racism, being treated unfairly for having a disability, or not having enough money to live comfortably.
- Choose one person to share your group’s answers.
- Talk about what kinds of people might stand at the front or back of the line based on their identity (like race, gender, or income).
- Examples:
 - Privilege: Being white, male, rich, cisgender, or straight.
 - Oppression: Facing racism, sexism, homophobia, or other unfair treatment.
- Discuss how privilege isn’t about being a good or bad person—it’s just a starting point that affects opportunities.

line of privilege

Learn how privilege and oppression impact mental health



instructions:

- Try Again:
 - Set up the recycling bin again and ask: “How can we make this game fair for everyone?”
 - Ideas:
 - Form a circle around the bin so everyone has the same chance.
 - Take turns standing in the front.
 - Give everyone a prize, no matter what.
 - Play again with the new set up the group agrees on and give prizes to everyone.
 - The prize isn’t for scoring - it’s for working together to make things fair!

discussion:

- How did the activity show privilege and oppression?
- What did you learn that was new?
- How does privilege affect mental health?
- How does oppression affect mental health?
- If you have privilege, how can you help make things fair for others at school or in your community?

facilitator notes:

- It’s okay to feel different emotions while learning about this. Some people might feel bad about having privilege, and others might feel upset about oppression. Both feelings are normal.
- The point is not to make anyone feel guilty or ashamed. Instead, it’s to help us understand the world and think about how we can make it better.
- If someone needs to take a break during the activity, that’s okay. They can also talk to a teacher or school counselor for support.

social media is lying to you

Discuss the way that social media affects our mental health & the ways we compare our lives to others



supplies:

- A/V Equipment
- Paper & Writing Utensils
- Video

goals:

- Discuss and identify the impact that social media has on you & your relationships
- Envision and brainstorm what the ideal social media platform would be like

instructions:

- Pass out paper and writing utensils, and give everyone 3 minutes to independently write down their response to the following prompt:
 - “As you scroll through social media, what emotions do you feel?”
- Give everyone the opportunity to share what they wrote with a partner or two for 3 minutes.
- Play the video.
- Go through the discussion questions as a group.
- Have folks write down one thing they’re taking away from today’s discussion on the piece of paper they responded to the first prompt on.

discussion:

- What resonated with you from the video? What didn’t?
- What does comparison feel like for you?
- Do you think comparison is helpful?
- Social media is often referred to as a “highlight reel” of someone’s life, meaning it only shows the very best parts. Do you think this is accurate? Why or why not?
- What would you change about your relationship with social media?
- What is one thing you can do to help make sure you stay in a healthy mindset when it comes to social media?

heal from stress

Design bandages while sharing ways you “heal” from stressful times



supplies:

- Paper bandages OR Real adhesive bandages
- Markers, pens, stickers
- Scissors
- Glue Sticks or Tape
- Poster Boards (if putting around the center)

instructions:

- Introduce the purpose of the activity – promoting mental health awareness, healthy coping mechanisms, and share support within the school community
- Open up a discussion about the importance of healing and coping strategies while in a stressful or difficult situation. Ask the group about their experiences, and let them share for 5 minutes or so
- Then, pass out the bandage cutouts or the adhesive bandages to each participant
- Pass out supplies like markers, pens, and stickers for decorating
- Ask everyone to write short coping strategies that they use on the bandages
 - Encourage them to decorate the bandages too!
 - Examples could include: journaling, exercise, music, cuddling a pet, talking to a friend, etc.
- Play background music to set the scene for a calming activity and encourage folks to talk to their peers about how they “heal”
- Folks can either stick their bandages on their bag/a notebook OR check out the center -wide adaptation below for more ideas

goals:

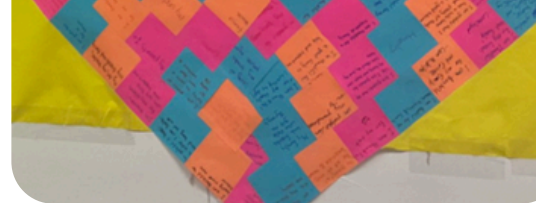
- Promote social connectedness and remind folks that everyone struggles with stress at some point in time
- Foster a welcoming environment where students feel comfortable discussing their stressors and self-care habits
- Offer a sense of community support
- Beautify the center with visual reminders of positivity and support

discussion:

- Can you share a time when you felt stressed and what did you do to feel better/recover?
- How does engaging in activities, like this one, help manage stress?
- Do you think creating art is a form of healing?
- How can we as a center community support and allow each other to heal in times of stress?

center -wide adaptation:

- Put up posters around the center with taped-on paper bandages or pockets/envelopes to hold them.
- Anyone walking by can grab a blank bandage, decorate it with a coping strategy or encouraging message, and stick it back on the board or in the pocket.
- If someone needs a little boost or reminder to take care of themselves, they can grab a bandage from the pocket anytime.



**Thank you for your
commitment to teen mental
health! Together, we can
save lives.**

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