



Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning for Students



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Edition 1

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1. Introduction

“You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.”

- Buddha

Mental Health is just as important as physical health. It can affect your life in many different ways. In this guide, we will talk about what mental health is, how to take care of mental health, mental health disorders, how positive mental health is correlated with academic achievement and how to start a mental health club at your school. There should not be a stigma around mental health issues. There are many ways to reduce the stigma around mental health in your community whether it's within your family, friends, or even school.

Mental Health

What is Mental Health?

Our mental health is defined by our social, emotional and psychological health. Our mental health influences how we respond to stress and anxiety. It influences how we act, feel, perceive, and cope. Mental health is just as important as physical health.



Mental Health Challenges

Numerous factors can cause mental health challenges

- Genes or Brain Chemistry
- Experiences such as trauma and abuse
- Anxiety and stress

Symptoms of Mental Health Challenges

- Decreased energy, fatigue, or feeling "slowed down"
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Overeating or undereating
- Oversleeping or undersleeping
- Thoughts of self-harm

How to Cope with Mental Health Issues

It is essential you get the help you need and start speaking to a professional or contact your healthcare provider. You are not alone and your mental health is just as important as your physical health.



U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, (2022 Feb.) "What is Mental Health."

The Mental Health Spectrum



Healthy	Coping	Struggling	Unwell
<p>In this stage, you may have minor issues with your mental health like strong emotions. However, these issues aren't taking over your life and are temporary. You can maintain this stage by taking care of your physical health and practicing self care.</p>	<p>In this stage, you may be coping with a mental health disorder. Coping can involve getting the help you need from a mental health professional. Maybe, it involves talking to a trusted person. Mental health issues are nothing to be embarrassed about and it is important you get the help you need.</p>	<p>In this stage, you may notice a mental health disorder beginning to take over your life. Your mental health disorder starts to prevent you from achieving your goals. Maybe it affects your relationships with others or even school. When you notice your mental health disorder getting to this point, you need to get help from a mental health professional.</p>	<p>In this stage, you may notice a mental health disorder completely taking over your life. It keeps you from your relationships with others. It prevents you from participating in school and school activities. Maybe others notice. Sometimes they don't. If you notice your mental health is at this point, speak to a mental health professional.</p>

Your mental health status does not have to fit into one of these categories. If you are struggling with a mental health issue, you need to speak to a mental health professional. You can start with your school counselor.

Call 988 for the Suicide and Crisis hotline.

2. How to Take Care of Your Mental Health

“You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Taking care of your mental health is important because it makes you better equipped to deal with mental health issues. There are a lot of measures you can take to help with your mental health. Even taking care of your physical health by drinking water, exercising, and getting sleep can help your mental health. Taking care of your mental health can also include self care, distancing yourself from toxic people and situations, and keeping a positive or neutral mindset.

Sleep

Why Do You Need Sleep?

Getting good rest protects our mental and physical health. During sleep our body is supporting our brain in a healthy way, and in our youth, sleep helps to support growth and development.

How Much

The amount of sleep that you need will change depending on who you are and will decrease as you age.

- Children ages 6-12 need 9-12 hours of sleep per day.
- Teens aged 13-18 should sleep 8-10 hours a day.
- Adults aged 18 and older should get 7-8 hours of sleep a day.



Sleep Comfortably

- Go to sleep and wake up at the same time everyday even on the weekends.
- Make sure there are no electronic devices in your room
- Be physically active during the day.
- Make sure your room is as comfortable as possible.

Exercise

Exercise for Mental Health

Benefits of physical activity and different types of exercise can impact your life in many ways. Unfortunately, almost half of youth ages 8 to 15 don't receive the treatment they need because there are so many barriers, like stigma, costs, or side effects. However, exercise has been researched and validated for treating many mental health conditions.

Different types of Exercise

Try to get 1 hour of physical activity daily. Some ways to accomplish this are:

- swimming
- biking
- dancing
- jogging

How Will Exercise Help You?

There are many benefits to physical activity, especially to brain health. The benefits can happen immediately after a session of moderate to intense physical activity. Some of the benefits include, improved thinking or cognition for youth ages 6 to 13 years and reduced short-term feelings of anxiety for older ages. Regular physical activity is better, this can keep your thinking, learning, and judgment skills sharp as you age. It can also help reduce your risk of depression, anxiety, and may also help you sleep better.

Self Care

What is self care?

Self care is taking the time to act in ways that can improve your physical or mental health. Doing self care properly can have a positive impact on your mental health. Self care can help with managing stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy.

Examples of Self Care

There are different types of self care and even small things can count as self care. Self care is an action you take that can positively affect you. Everyone has different needs and different preferences for self care.

- Get regular exercise
- Eat healthy and regularly
- Keep Hydrated
- Keep a gratitude journal
- Try a relaxing hobby
- Meditation
- Make sleep a priority
- Connect with positive people
- Focus on keeping a positive mindset
- Set goals and priorities for each day



Self care looks different for everyone. If you are struggling with a mental health disorder, practicing self care can include getting the help you need from a medical professional or counselor.

3. Mental Health Disorders

“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary.”

- Fred Rogers

About 1 in 5 teenagers have mental health issues. Mental health issues are not something to be embarrassed of. If you are struggling with a mental health issue then it is important you get the help you need. It is important you speak with a medical professional or your school counselor. If you urgently need help, call 988 for the Crisis Hotline. Here are some of the common mental health issues in teenagers.

Depression

What is Depression?

Depression is a common and serious mood disorder. Symptoms of depression can affect how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working.



Symptoms of Depression

There are many symptoms of depression that are unique to everyone. Symptoms include:

- Persistent sadness, anxiousness, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Decreased energy, fatigue, or feeling "slowed down"
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts

How to confront depression

It is essential to start speaking to a professional or contact your healthcare provider. Other ways to address depression include physical activity, refraining from drug and alcohol usage, and talking with trusted people. *National Institute of Health, (2022 September) “Depression” NIMH » Depression (nih.gov)*



Anxiety

What are Anxiety disorders?

Anxiety that occurs occasionally is a normal part of life. However, anxiety disorders are not just temporary feelings of nervousness or fear. These disorders begin to interfere with daily activities.

Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders

There are many different kinds of anxiety disorders. Some symptoms include:



Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- Feeling restless, wound-up, or on-edge
- Being easily fatigued
- Difficulty controlling feelings of worry

Panic Disorder

- Pounding or racing heart
- Trembling or tingling
- Feelings of impending doom
- Feelings of being out of control



How to cope with Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are generally treated with therapy, medication, or both. There are different ways to treat anxiety. You should work with a health care provider to choose the best treatment for you.

National Institute of Health, (2022 April) "Anxiety Disorders" [NIMH](#) » [Depression \(nih.gov\)](#)

PTSD



What is PTSD?

PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) is a disorder that occurs in people who have just been through a traumatic event. Such events can be shocking, scary, or even dangerous. Most traumatized people experience symptoms of PTSD. However, some people develop chronic PTSD which can take over their lives.

Symptoms of PTSD

Effects of trauma and PTSD can get triggered for years after a traumatic event has happened.

Some symptoms of PTSD include:

- Flashbacks of trauma
- Nightmares
- Frightening thoughts
- Feeling tense
- Avoiding thoughts about the traumatic event
- Trouble remembering main parts of the traumatic event



How to Cope with PTSD

PTSD affects everyone differently. There is no one size fits all approach to treatment. It is important to start talking to a healthcare provider and get the help you need. *U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, (2022 Feb.) "What is PTSD" [What Is Mental Health?](#) | [MentalHealth.gov](#)*

Substance Use Disorders

What are substance use disorders?

A substance use disorder is a mental health disorder that can affect a person's mind and behavior. A person becomes unable to control their use of substances such as drugs and alcohol. Addiction is the most severe form of substance use disorders. Mental health challenges and disorders that go untreated can lead to substance use disorders.

Symptoms of Substance Use Disorders

- Symptoms of being under the influence of substances:
 - Bloodshot eyes
 - Slurred and confused speech
 - Impaired coordination
- Change in appetite or sleep patterns
- Changes in weight (gain or loss)
- Tolerance to substance
- Neglecting responsibilities
- Feeling tired or 'spaced out'



- Appearing fearful, anxious, or paranoid for no reason

How to confront Substance Use Disorders

Treatment for substance use disorders is specific to an individual. It is important that you speak with a therapist or medical professional to properly evaluate these disorders. Substance use disorders can lead to addiction which can take over one's life.

National Institute of Health, (2022 September) "Substance Use Disorders" NIMH » Depression (nih.gov)

Eating Disorders

What are eating disorders?

Eating disorders are not a choice. Eating disorders are serious mental health disorders that can result in death. Eating disorders are mental health issues that involve disturbances in eating patterns which may be a result of thoughts and emotions.

Symptoms of Eating Disorders

There are different types of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Symptoms include:

Obsession or preoccupation with food, weight, and shape

Symptoms and side effects of Anorexia

- Avoiding or restricting food
- Repeatedly checking weight
- Being underweight



Symptoms and side effects of Bulimia

- Eating large amounts of food followed by forced vomiting, and/or the excessive use of laxatives or diuretics
- Severe dehydration
- Intestinal distress

How to confront Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are fatal and life threatening mental health disorders. It is important to seek help from a mental health professional for eating disorders.

National Institute of Health, (2022 September) "Eating Disorders" [NIMH » Depression \(nih.gov\)](#)

4. Dealing with Mental Health Disorders

“Mental health problems don’t define who you are. They are something you experience. You walk in the rain and you feel the rain, but, importantly, YOU ARE NOT THE RAIN.”

— Matt Haig

Everyone experiences problems with their mental health at some point in their lives the same way they experience problems with their physical health. Mental health issues can be seen as a spectrum, sometimes these issues are minor. Other times these issues are major and begin to take over our lives. When this happens, it is important you get the help you need and deserve. Talk to a medical professional or a school counselor. If your issue is urgent, call the Crisis Hotline at 988.

Mental Health Help Through Professionals

Who are mental health professionals?

There are several ways to get mental health help. One way is through mental health professionals. Seeking help from mental health professionals is nothing to be embarrassed about. Keep in mind that when you get help from mental health professionals, everything is kept confidential.

Mental health professionals can treat mental health issues through therapy, medication, or both. Mental Health professionals don't always have to be medical professionals.

Mental Health Professionals

Mental Health Professionals that can diagnose disorders are Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Counselors, Therapists, Clinical Social Workers, and Clinicians.

Mental health professionals that can prescribe medication and therapy include Primary Care Physicians, Psychiatrists, Psychiatric Pharmacists or Mental Health Nurse Practitioners.

There are other professionals in your community that you can refer to for mental health help. At school, you can talk to your counselor. If you don't have a counselor at your school, speak to a trusted adult about getting professional help.



Supporting Someone with a Mental Health Challenge

How do you support someone with mental health issues?

If you want to help someone close to you who is dealing with mental health challenges, you can connect them to a mental health professional. Remember that there are professionals who can help and you do not need to take this on by yourself. You can also offer support in other ways by checking in with your friend or family member, expressing that you care about them and respect them, including them in your conversations and being a positive person to be around.



Supporting someone with mental health challenges

- Recognize that mental health issues are not something embarrassing and they are just like physical health challenges
- Understand that mental health problems are not a choice
- Offer support if you can by helping reduce stress in their life
- Take their feelings and symptoms seriously

Supporting someone with a mental health emergency

If you are worried for your friend or family member's safety, it is imperative you take action. If they are expressing suicidal or self-harm ideations call the Crisis and Suicide hotline at 988 or contact a mental health professional.

5. Mental Health and School

“I can’t change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination”

—Jimmy Dean

Your mental health and education have a direct link. If you are struggling with a mental health issue, it can be hard to focus on school and education. Mental health doesn't just affect your education, it can also affect your participation in school activities like sports, clubs, playing an instrument or singing. It can also affect your relationships with your friends and teachers. At school, there are a lot of mental health stressors that can negatively affect your mental health. Here are some of them.

Peer Pressure

What is Peer Pressure?

Peer pressure is the influence pushed by a peer/friend group on someone to fit in or conform with the group's norms and expectations. Peer pressure can have negative consequences for mental or physical health. You may face peer pressure to use tobacco products, drink alcohol, do drugs, or have sex. Knowing that you have the power to say no and resisting negative peer pressure and making better choices for yourself can help you feel good.

Social Media & Peer Pressure

Social media can play a huge role in our lives, and that can be good or bad. The U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, issued a warning about the impact of social media on the mental health of young people saying it was an “urgent crisis”. With everything that happens on social media, it can be difficult to resist the things we see other people doing, but we need to keep in mind that social media does not show the full picture. Just know that you do not have to engage in behaviors that match the "social norms" of valued and desired friend groups in order to receive praise or friendship. If you feel uncomfortable doing something, then just say no.



How to Stop Peer Pressure

Stay away from peers who pressure you to do things that seem wrong or dangerous or against your own values. Learn how to say "no" and practice how to avoid/get out of situations when you feel unsafe or uncomfortable. **Spend time** with other people who say no. Having a friend who is always willing to say "no" is helpful. Talk to an adult if you think it necessary.

Stress

What is Stress?

Stress is the physical or mental response to an external cause such as having a lot of homework or having an illness. A stressor can be a long term or a shorter term occurrence or it can be a repeated occurrence.

Symptoms of Stress

Symptoms of stress are very similar to symptoms of anxiety. These symptoms include:

- Excessive worry
- Uneasiness
- Tension
- Headaches or body pain
- High blood pressure
- Loss of sleep

How to Manage Stress

Learning what causes or triggers your stress and what coping techniques work for you can help reduce your anxiety and improve your daily life. These are some activities you can do if you feel overwhelmed:

- Exercise, and make sure you are eating healthy, regular meals.
- Stick to a sleep routine, and make sure you are getting enough sleep.
- Avoid drinking excess caffeine such as soft drinks or coffee.
- Identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts.

Loneliness

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is the strong feeling of being alone or separated. All of us have experienced loneliness before. Most of the time it's temporary. Maybe your friend wasn't at school that day. Maybe you have no one to sit with at lunch. However, you can have a feeling of constant loneliness. Because of the pandemic, a lot of teenagers have issues with socializing which leads to challenges with social connection. You shouldn't feel embarrassed if you are dealing with these issues.

How does loneliness affect your mental health?

Loneliness can affect your concentration in and outside of school. This can affect your physical health by causing you to lose sleep, making you lose your appetite, and lowering your energy levels. Feeling lonely for too long can cause social isolation and eventually depression. Try to be gentle with yourself and remember not to keep yourself from loved ones and social activities. If you feel your loneliness begin to take control of your life, it is important to speak with a mental health professional.



Coping with Loneliness

There are many steps you can take to socialize more. You can start communicating with a loved one. You can start making friends or finding people to sit with during lunch. You can become more involved in school. Maybe join a club or organization you're interested in. You can also practice self care.

Toxic Relationships

Who is a toxic person?

A toxic person is someone who brings out the worst in you. Maybe they encourage you to do bad things that could put you in danger or affect your future. Maybe they are manipulative and abusive. Maybe this person is someone who you are in a romantic relationship with. Maybe this person is a friend that you are very close with. Toxic people and relationships can take over your life. It is important you recognize toxicity and get out of these situations.

Signs of a toxic person

- They always shift the blame to you
- They can't admit they made a mistake
- They don't respect your boundaries
- They lie
- They always act like the victim
- They disregard your feelings
- They gaslight you
- You feel drained after being with them
- They are selfish
- They are abusive

If someone is hurting you, speak to a trusted adult. If you are in immediate danger, call 911. Call 988 for the Crisis Hotline.

Getting out of a Toxic Relationship

How do I start?

Getting out of a toxic relationship can be hard, but it is very important for your mental health. Being in a toxic relationship can keep you from school and other activities. It can also affect your relationships with others. When getting out of a toxic relationship, it is important to be patient with yourself. First, make sure you have a support system. Lean on your healthy relationships as you explore ways to become more independent. Then, start taking small steps to isolate yourself from that person. Maybe this is breaking up with them. Maybe this involves hanging out with other friends.

Steps to Take

- Identify the toxicity in your life
- Get a good support system
- Be firm on ending the relationship
- Set boundaries for yourself
- Slowly begin to cut off contact with this person

Cutting off contact and ending a relationship with a toxic person can be hard. It's okay for it to be hard. But if this person is negatively impacting your life and mental health, then it is important to end this relationship. During this process, it is important that you practice self care and get support from others.

If someone is hurting you, speak to a trusted adult. If you are in immediate danger, call 911. Call 988 for the Crisis Hotline.

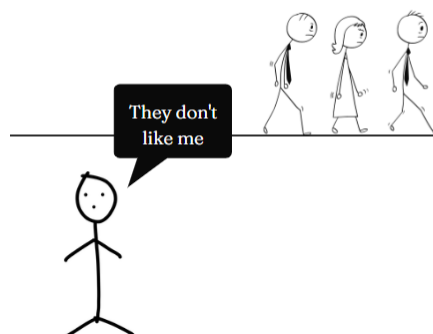
Keeping a Healthy Mindset

Why should I keep a healthy mindset?

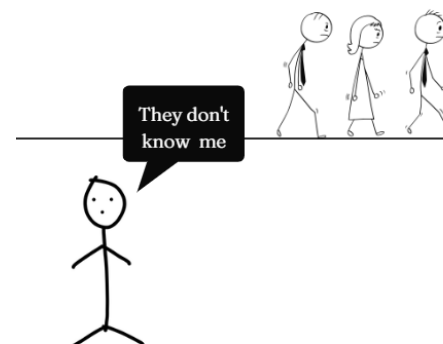
A healthy mindset doesn't always have to be positive. Think of a healthy mindset as more neutral. A mindset is a group of beliefs that shape your personality and perception of the world around you. At school, it can be hard to keep a healthy mindset when there are so many unhealthy stressors around you. However, keeping a healthy mindset is the key to having and maintaining a healthy mental state.

Steps to having a healthy mindset

- Keep healthy boundaries
- Don't let setbacks and challenges define you too much
- Be neutral about situations
- Don't take things too personally
- Don't let anyone's actions affect you too much



Negative Mindset



Healthy, Neutral Mindset

6. Social Media and Mental Health

“Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.” - Anne Lamott

How Does Social Media Impact Mental Health?

In an era dominated by technology, smartphones, and social media, it is imperative that we find ways to make the internet a safer place for teenagers to interact. One significant factor that negatively impacts the mental health of teenagers is unhealthy social media usage. Poor mental health in young adults can lead to suicidal thoughts, depression, substance abuse, and even acts of violence.

The mental health in teens now is worse than it has ever been. Numerous studies have shown that unhealthy social media usage can result in increased stress and anxiety, depression, violent behavior, and low self-esteem. It can also lead to cyberbullying. The emotional effects of cyberbullying, which are similar to those of unhealthy social media use, can persist long after the bullying or social media usage has stopped.

How Can You Use Social Media Safely?

Promoting healthy social media use and addressing cyberbullying can have a significant impact on the mental health of teenagers. This includes education on responsible online behavior, support for those affected by cyberbullying, and access to mental health resources. From an individual perspective, having screen time limits and paying attention to sleep, diet and exercise can help negate the adverse effects of poor social media usage on mental health. Schools need to have mental health clubs, safe spaces for students to discuss their feelings and concerns under the guidance of a trained mental health counselor. Schools and communities can play a vital role in implementing these strategies,

such as providing workshops on digital citizenship, creating safe spaces for students to discuss their experiences, and increasing the availability of mental health professionals.

Here are some tips to help you make sure you are not overusing social media:

- Use an app to track how much time you spend on social media each day
- Turn off your phone at certain times of the day, such as when you're driving, in a meeting, at the gym, having dinner, or spending time with offline friends
- Don't bring your phone or tablet to bed
- Disable social media notifications
- Limit checking your Socials

If followed, these tips will ensure that you are not using social media in an unhealthy way.

7. Mental health and Social Emotional Learning for Academic and Career Achievement

"Your present circumstances don't determine where you go; they merely determine where you start." — Nido Qubein

What is Social Emotional Learning?

Social emotional learning (SEL) is the process of developing the self-awareness, self-control, emotional regulation and interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work, and life success

Research shows that people with strong social emotional skills are able to deal with the stress and challenges of home, school, family and career and be successful in their endeavors. It helps individuals, schools, corporations and communities.

SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities.

What is the RULER method?

Dr. Marc Brackett, a pioneering psychologist from Yale has done a tremendous amount of research in this area in recent times and has come up with the RULER method to address it.

R- Recognize emotions in yourself and others

U- Understand the causes and results of emotions

L- Label emotions accurately

E- Express emotions appropriately

R- Regulate emotions effectively

Understanding and utilizing the RULER method can allow an individual to take charge of their feelings and emotions.

- Fear: a response to a perceived threat or danger
- Contempt: a feeling of disdain for something
- Disgust: a feeling of revulsion or aversion
- Sadness: a feeling of sorrow or unhappiness
- Anger: a feeling of annoyance or hostility
- Happiness: a feeling of joy or satisfaction
- Surprise: a feeling of astonishment or wonder

8. How to start a Mental Health club at your School

“For there is always a light, if only we are brave enough to see it, if only we are brave enough to be it.”- Amanda Gorman

Do you want to put a stop to the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health at your school? Do you want to make your campus a more equitable place? Do you want to educate others at your school on mental health? Starting a mental health club or support group can help you with this. It can also help others around you. It sounds like a daunting task, but getting help from the right people makes it easier. Starting a mental health club at your school is the first step to spreading awareness and reducing the stigma around mental health. By starting a mental health club, you can educate others to encourage students to get the mental health help they deserve.

Starting a Mental Health Support Group at your School

How do I begin?

First, it is important to have a plan in mind of why you want to start a support group at your school. Your plan doesn't have to be elaborate, it just has to show your intention. Next, speak with a sponsor who can be a teacher or school counselor. Let them know about your idea and discuss your plan with them. After that, you need to decide how large you want your group to be. If you want cohesion and connection in your group, it is recommended you have a smaller group. If you want to reach as many people as possible, and if your school allows it, you can have a larger group. Think about which type of group would be ideal for you and your classmates. Then, with your sponsor, you can go through your school's process of getting this club approved.

How often should we meet?

Usually, many schools require that an adult or mental health professional is present in these mental health support groups. It is important that you talk to your club sponsor about their availability too. You can also talk to potential members of your club about their availability. Maybe, you want to meet once a week.

Maybe, others are busy and you end up meeting once every two weeks. Meeting times depend on who sponsors your club, and the people in your club.



What to Talk About in your Mental Health Club

How do I decide what to talk about?

It is important that you discuss with your sponsor the direction you want your club to go in. Each club should have positive, welcoming discussions. You can start with icebreakers on the first day and let everyone get to know each other. You can discuss why everyone decided to join the club if they're comfortable with it. Then, in other meetings, you can have discussions about mental health conditions and how to help someone. You can also talk about methods for dealing with mental health issues. Each mental health club may have a different purpose, it is important that you and your sponsor tailor content towards the purpose of your club.

Why is it important to have a counselor present?

Sometimes, classmates can say things in your club that you, as a student, are not equipped to deal with. Someone who is trained in mental health like a counselor can help this person. Counselors can also guide your club and help you decide on what content to talk about in your club. Also, if you have a counselor present, your school is more likely to approve your club.

What if I don't have a counselor at school?

If you don't have a counselor at your school, don't worry. You can talk to a teacher about sponsoring your club. You can also speak to other mental health professionals in your community if you need extra guidance.

What are the advantages of a Student run Mental Health Club?

Some of the advantages of a student run mental health club are

1. The students are more likely to share their emotional issues and concerns in a setting of peers
2. They will be more interactive and innovative
3. They will cater better to the needs of the students and are better received since the proposals are made by their peers
4. With the shortage of mental health professionals across the country they will make better use of the scarce resources
5. Additionally the students can be trained in basics of mental health support and thereby recognize these issues amongst their peers and encourage them to see the help of School counselors

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Go to <https://foundationmhe.org/> for more info on mental health and social emotional learning.

Our feelings are not there to be cast out or conquered. They're there to be engaged and expressed with imagination and intelligence. -T.K.

Coleman

Call 988 for the Suicide and Crisis hotline