

Improve Your Mood, Mindset, & Mental Health

A Guide for Students



It would be great if we all could feel happy, supported, and successful all of the time. But, of course, this isn't possible. Things get us down, annoy us, and sometimes make us feel helpless and scared. And that's okay.

Whether you generally feel good and have a positive mindset, or you are struggling with your mental health, the information in this booklet will help you better understand how your mental health affects your mood and mindset. This booklet also provides tips on how you can deal with common issues like stress and anxiety—and find more joy in your day-to-day life.



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Mental Health Is Important

Mental health refers to your social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Although your mental health can be impacted by things you can't control, you can control how well you look after it.

Why is mental health important?

Mental health affects how you feel day-to-day

When you're feeling calm, happy, and confident, you get more joy out of life. On the other hand, if you're feeling sad, angry, or anxious, regular day-to-day life can be a struggle.

Mental health affects your relationships

Your relationships with family, friends, and classmates are all impacted by how you feel. If you're unhappy, upset, or feeling down, building and maintaining relationships is much more difficult.

Mental health affects your success

Whether it's success in school, your career, or achieving a goal you've set, you're more likely to succeed when you're in a good place mentally.



Take care of your mental health

Just as you take care of your physical health, you also need to take care of your mental health. This means having healthy ways to deal with stress, and talking to those you trust about any problems you are having.

Taking Care of Your Mental Health

Just like with your physical health, maintaining your mental health every day in small ways is important for your well-being.

Here are some ways you can take care of your mental health each day.

Get enough sleep

The amount of sleep you get impacts your mood. Go to bed at a regular time each night and make sure that you get at least eight hours of sleep.



Exercise

Your body releases mood-improving chemicals when you exercise. Look for ways to integrate physical activity into your daily routine.

Eat healthy

Your diet has a huge impact on your mental health. Food fuels your body's health, including your brain. Research shows that nutrients found in healthy foods like fish, fruits, and vegetables can improve brain function and mental health.

Reflect

Put your phone away, turn off the TV, and take time every day to rest, relax, and reflect. Try writing your thoughts in a journal.

Be grateful

Notice the things you are thankful for in your everyday life. Regularly reflect on, and feel grateful for, each of these things.

Talk about it

Talking about your feelings is a great way to process them—and to put things in perspective. Talk to a friend or family member when you have a problem or something is bothering you.

Dealing with Stress



Stress is your body's reaction to change, demands, or difficult situations.

We all experience stress from time to time—it's a part of life. However, if we have too much stress, it can interfere with our day-to-day lives.

Ways to reduce stress

Confront your stressors

Make a list of the things that are stressing you out and determine how each can be dealt with. Having a plan will help you feel more empowered and less overwhelmed.

Take time for yourself

Do something that has made you feel calm and relaxed in the past. Listen to music, go for a walk, play with a pet, or spend time in nature.

If it's beyond your control, let it go

If you're stressed over things you can't change, let those worries go completely.

Get support

Confide in others when you're feeling stressed. Whether it's a friend, family member, spiritual leader, or counselor, it's much healthier to share your concerns than it is to go it alone.

Feeling overwhelmed? Watch this quick video!



Dealing with Anger

Everyone gets angry from time to time. But if your anger is affecting your relationships and the quality of your life, then perhaps you should think about what you can do to manage your anger.

Ways to manage anger

Relax

When you start to get angry, close your eyes, imagine a relaxing scene, and breathe deeply. Breathe in, count to four, and exhale. Repeat.

Express your feelings

Bottling up anger can make things worse. If you're feeling angry or irritated, pause for a moment, organize your thoughts, and calmly express your feelings.

Keep track of your thoughts

Sometimes it can be helpful to keep track of what makes you angry, as well as how often it happens.

Use "I" statements

"I" statements describe a problem from your point of view, rather than assigning blame or being aggressive. For example, saying, *"I'm upset because you didn't tell me you'd be late,"* is better than saying, *"You are never on time."*

Take a timeout

If you have a hard time staying calm in an emotionally charged situation, remove yourself, take several deep breaths, and organize your thoughts.



Understanding Depression



We all go through times when we feel down or unhappy. For most of us, these periods are temporary and we soon feel better.

People who suffer from depression, however, have persistent, overwhelming feelings of sadness and hopelessness. These feelings affect their schoolwork, relationships, and their overall well-being.

Symptoms of depression

- ▶ feelings of hopelessness
- ▶ feeling empty or numb
- ▶ loss of interest in activities
- ▶ sleeping too little or too much
- ▶ lack of energy
- ▶ trouble concentrating
- ▶ thoughts of suicide
- ▶ eating too much or too little

What causes depression?

Depression is caused by a number of things, including illness, an imbalance of brain chemicals, genetics, substance abuse, and stressful life events. Individuals with depression can't just snap out of it. People suffering from depression have nothing to be embarrassed about or to feel ashamed of.

Ways to cope with depression

If you're suffering from depression, or just feeling down, here are some things you can do to feel better.

Confide in others

When you're feeling down or depressed, this is the time to lean on your family and friends. Talk to them about what you're going through, and about how you're feeling.

Use positive self-talk

Change your negative thoughts into positive, encouraging messages.

Take care of yourself

Eat healthy food, get enough sleep, and exercise often. Studies show there is a definite link between our sleep (quantity and quality), diet, and our mood. Physical activity can also lift your spirits and make you feel better, even if it's just going for a walk.

Help someone else

Helping others can make you feel good about yourself and curb feelings of depression. Look for opportunities to volunteer at your school and in your community.

Get professional help

If you're suffering from depression or feeling bad for long periods of time, talk to a counselor or doctor. Therapy and/or medication may be what's needed to help you cope with your symptoms and feel better.



Supporting others

If a friend or family member is suffering from depression, it can be stressful and sometimes scary. If you're close to someone experiencing depression, let them know that you're there to listen and that you care about them. Regardless of what they say, try not to scold, lecture, or get upset. Encourage them get support from a mental health professional.

Dealing with Anxiety



When we feel anxious, our bodies often react by releasing adrenaline, which can increase our heart rate and breathing. For most people, the feelings of anxiety go away when the stressful situation that caused it is over, or when the problem is resolved.

Occasional anxiety is a part of life—it's a natural reaction to events or situations that are frightening or stressful.

Symptoms of anxiety

Some people suffer from anxiety that's persistent and long-lasting. Their anxiety affects their well-being and interferes with their day-to-day lives. These people often experience the following:

- ▶ excessive worry or feeling fearful for no clear reason
- ▶ difficulty sleeping and concentrating
- ▶ irritability, restlessness, and feeling on edge
- ▶ stomach issues

What is a panic attack?

A panic attack is a sudden feeling of severe fear and distress. A person who is having a panic attack may have chest pains, nausea, intense feelings of fear, sweating, shaking—and feel like something is physically wrong. If you experience a panic attack, take deep breaths and get to a safe place until it passes.

Ways to cope with anxiety

Anxiety can make day-to-day living very difficult. However, there are things you can do to reduce the feelings of anxiety. *Because it's hard to practice new behaviors when you're feeling anxious, practice these techniques when you're feeling relaxed and calm.*

Take deep breaths

Close your eyes and relax all of your muscles. Take a deep cleansing breath, slowly count to four, and then slowly release your breath—blowing away the anxiety and stress. Repeat. Deep breathing is very effective in helping you feel calm and relaxed.

Practice mindfulness

Notice things you don't normally pay attention to. Be aware of the sights, sounds, smells, and textures around you. Experience the feeling of your clothes on your body or the temperature in the room. Even better, pair this with deep breathing.

Get professional help

If anxiety is affecting your schoolwork or disrupting your life in other ways, confide in someone you trust. Talk to a family member, counselor, or doctor and ask for their help.

Social anxiety

People with social anxiety feel anxious in social situations. They find these situations very difficult, and often experience an intense fear of being ridiculed, judged, or rejected.



If you're feeling anxious about an upcoming social situation or event, think about what you can do to make it go well. Imagine what you might talk about, and think of questions you can ask others. Don't think about what could go wrong—visualize everything going well.

Social Media & Mental Health



While social media can add a lot to your life, it can also have some negative effects on your mental health.

Ways social media affects mental health

Edited lives

Everyone puts their best selves on social media. Sometimes, this can make you feel like everyone's life is more exciting and fun than yours. Just remember that on social media, you're only seeing selected snippets of someone's life.

Social media obsession

Being obsessed with social media can make you anxious and angry when you can't use it. Social media can also take up so much of your time that your schoolwork and relationships suffer. If you're overly involved with social media, ask yourself if it's making your life better or worse.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is taking a huge toll on the mental health of so many young people today. If you are being bullied online, it's not your fault. Stay strong, tell someone, and ask for help. If you are someone who has been mean to others online, try to put yourself in their shoes. Think about what you're doing, and about the pain you're causing.

If someone you know is being harassed or threatened online, or if you witness someone threatening to harm themselves or someone else, tell a trusted adult right away.

Be smart with technology

Be positive and kind online

Be extra polite to people online. They can't see your expression or hear your tone of voice, so what you say can easily be misunderstood. For everyone's mental health, only use social media for positive comments and to support others.

Think critically

Be sure to double-check facts, especially for information found on social media sites. Think for yourself. If something doesn't feel or sound right to you, it probably isn't. Photos are often doctored or filtered, and facts are often manipulated. Use common sense and trust your instincts.

Focus on what really matters

Make the choice every day to value the people in your life, and to enjoy the experiences you have in the real world. These are the things that truly define your health and happiness.



Improve your self-esteem

When you have high self-esteem, you're less likely to let social media drama get you down.

Accept and believe in yourself

Appreciate and accept yourself as a unique individual. Believe in yourself, and in your skills and abilities.

Develop your skills

Whether you like sports, writing, or cooking, developing your skills and becoming more accomplished at something is a great way to improve your self-esteem.

Accept that you are a work in progress

If you're often hard on yourself, cut yourself some slack. No one is perfect. Just strive to do your best.

For more on improving your self-esteem, watch this video!



Staying Calm & Relaxed

We all feel stressed, anxious, or angry at times. When you feel this way, it's important to have a toolbox of calming techniques to help you relax. Here are some quick and easy calming techniques.

Ways to calm down

Take deep breaths and relax your body

Breathing is the best way to feel calmer. Take a deep breath, count to four, and slowly exhale. Repeat. Then tense and release all of the muscles in your body, from top to bottom. Doing these things sends signals to your brain to be calm.

Keep a centering object

A centering object is any object (such as a stress ball, necklace, or smooth stone) that you can focus on when you want to feel calm.

Challenge negative thoughts

Question a negative thought by asking, *"Is this likely to happen?"* or thinking, *"Even if it happens, I can handle it."*

Change your thoughts

To help refocus your thoughts, visualize a bright red stop sign, say *"Stop,"* and then visualize something positive.



Try guided meditations

With guided meditation, a voice helps you relax your body and focus your thoughts. Guided meditations are available on Spotify, and on apps like Meditation Studio and Calm.



You Are Not Alone

No matter what you're going through, you don't have to go through it alone.

If you're struggling, remember...

You have nothing to be ashamed of

Don't hide how you feel because you think others will judge you. If you're feeling stuck, sad, overwhelmed, or anything negative, your feelings are real, valid, and you deserve to feel better.

It will get better

How you're feeling right now is temporary. Avoid making permanent decisions based on a temporary feeling.

There is help available

You *will* feel better if you get help. Talk to a parent, counselor, or doctor. To connect with an expert who can help, text HOME to 741741, or call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988.

For ways you can improve your mental health, watch this short video.



Have empathy, and try your best every day to be kind. You never know what someone else is going through. Your kindness could be the thing that gives them the strength to get the help they need.

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A Guide for Students

This booklet contains important information and advice on developing and maintaining a positive mood and mindset—and on ways to take care of your mental health.

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Ways to Improve Mental Health

Maintaining your mental health is just as important as maintaining your physical health.

Here are 10 ways to improve your mental health!

1. Get enough sleep.

The amount of sleep you get impacts your mood. Go to bed at a regular time each night and make sure you get at least eight hours of sleep.

2. Exercise.

Your body releases mood-improving chemicals when you exercise. Look for ways to integrate physical activity into your daily routine.

3. Open up to someone.

Talking about your feelings is a great way to process them. Talk to a friend or family member when you have a problem or something is bothering you.

4. Be mindful.

Mindfulness is being aware of the world around you and focusing on what you are experiencing. Throughout your day, remind yourself to be fully present, and to focus on the "now."

5. Deal with stress.

Stress can really take a toll on your mental health. To feel more empowered and less overwhelmed, make a list of the things that stress you out and come up with a plan for dealing with them.

6. Be grateful.

Notice the things you are thankful for in your everyday life. Regularly reflect on, and feel grateful for, each of these things.

7. Eat healthy.

Research shows that eating healthy foods like fish, fruits, and vegetables will help keep your body and your mind healthy and strong.

8. Help someone else.

Helping others has been shown to reduce stress and improve your mental health. It also just makes you feel good.

9. Reflect.

Put your phone away, turn off the TV, and take some time every day to rest, relax, and reflect. You might also try writing your thoughts in a journal.

10. Reach out for help.

Just like with physical health, we sometimes need the help of a professional to be at our best. If you'd like to feel better, talk to a counselor, advisor, or your family doctor.

Taking care of your mental health is important, and needing help isn't a sign of weakness. If you need help or just need to talk, contact the Crisis Text Line by texting HOME to 741741.



VIDEO

For more, watch this quick video!

10 WAYS TO REDUCE STRESS



These 10 tips will help you manage stress, find your calm, and get more enjoyment out of life.

1. IDENTIFY YOUR STRESSORS. Make a list of the things that are stressing you out and determine how each can be dealt with. Having a plan will help you feel less overwhelmed and more empowered.

2. TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF. Do something that has made you feel calm and relaxed in the past. Listen to music, go for a walk, or spend time in nature.

3. IF IT'S BEYOND YOUR CONTROL, LET IT GO. If you're stressed about things you can't change, let those worries go completely.

4. RELAX. Close your eyes and imagine a relaxing scene. Breathe in slowly and slowly exhale. Repeat.

5. EAT HEALTHY. Having a healthy diet improves your mood, motivation, and mental health.

6. GET ENOUGH SLEEP. The amount of sleep you get affects your mood and your ability to tackle problems. Never sacrifice sleep to get everything done.



7. WRITE IN A JOURNAL.

Writing down your emotions and thoughts, including what's causing you stress, can be a good way to work through your feelings.

8. LEARN TO SAY NO.

Sometimes simply having a lot to do—even things you enjoy and want to do—can cause you stress. Know that it's okay to turn down requests and invitations.

9. GET ACTIVE.

Moving your body is a very effective stress reliever. Whether it's shooting some hoops, doing yoga, or just going for a walk, being active can help you clear your mind and feel calmer.

10. GET SUPPORT.

When you're feeling stressed, reach out to others for support. Talk to a parent or family member, a favorite teacher, or your counselor.

Stress and anxiety are closely related.

For some tips on how to deal with anxiety, watch this short video.



VIDEO

Finding Your **Calm**



**Activities to help you
learn **mindfulness,**
meditation, and
positivity**

What is “your calm?”

What does calm mean to you? Relaxed? Quiet? Anxiety-free? Peaceful? Stress-free?

This activity book goes through some of the most effective ways to help you find your calm, whatever that might be.

As you go through these activities, be positive and open-minded, even if you're skeptical about this meditation and mindfulness stuff. Anything that will help you relax and deal with stress is worth a try!

What do you do to help you feel calm? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> listen to soft music | <input type="checkbox"/> take a walk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> read a book | <input type="checkbox"/> play with a pet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sit in my room | <input type="checkbox"/> take a bath |
| <input type="checkbox"/> watch TV | <input type="checkbox"/> be in nature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | |

Use deep breathing and visualization to find calm.

Deep breathing

Find a comfortable place to sit, close your eyes, and relax your body. Breathe in deeply, and slowly count to four. On four, slowly release your breath. Then repeat. *Deep breathing is an easy, effective way to help you feel calm and relaxed.*

Visualization

Close your eyes and imagine a relaxing scene, adding as many details as you can. Even better, pair your visualization with deep breathing.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is simply making the effort to notice things that you wouldn't normally pay attention to. When you aren't mindful, you're basically on auto-pilot, letting the chaos of the outside world and your own worries and fears guide your emotions.

You can practice mindfulness by “targeting” your attention. For example, when you're walking outside, pay attention to things you don't normally notice—the sounds you hear, the scenery, the people and buildings you pass.

Being mindful is also about paying attention to how you feel.

Try this. Close your eyes and clear your mind. Take several deep breaths and focus on your mind and body. Think about how you're feeling.

What did you notice about how you're feeling, physically and mentally?

Being mindful can help you be more aware, feel calmer, and be more in the moment—and it's something you get better at with practice. Remind yourself to be “in the now” and to be fully present throughout the day, in and out of class, with others, and alone.

Try meditation.

Meditation can help you find calm and feel more centered and grounded. And the best part? Anyone can meditate.

You can meditate by sitting quietly and listening to your breathing, or by going for a walk, taking some deep breaths, and noticing what you see, feel, and hear. You can also try a guided meditation app, like Calm, or stream guided meditations on Spotify or YouTube. *Find what works best for you!*

For some calming techniques, watch this quick video.



Gratitude

Research shows that people who make an effort to be more grateful sleep better, are less stressed, and experience fewer health problems. Taking small moments every day to be grateful can go a long way in improving your mood and overall well-being.

What are three things you're grateful for right now?

Write a thank you letter.

Think of someone to whom you are grateful. Write a thank you letter to them (even if they never see it) telling them how they have positively affected your life.

For more, watch this quick video.



Challenging Negativity

Everyone falls victim to negative thinking from time to time, especially when the world seems stressful and chaotic. For example, we have all done the following:

- ▶ anticipated the worst (“I know I won’t make the soccer team.”)
- ▶ blamed ourselves (“It’s probably my fault he’s upset.”)
- ▶ fixated on the downside of things (“It’s raining. Our plans are ruined.”)

Regularly doing these things can create a pattern of negative thinking that can affect your mental health, and even your success in life.

So what’s the key to challenging negativity and being more positive?

Know that while you don’t always have control over the things that happen, you do have control over how you react to them—which means that you can choose to react to things in a positive way.

Challenge your negative thoughts.

In the grid below, write down two difficult or disappointing situations you’ve experienced. Then write down a negative and a positive way to think about each.

Situation	Negative Thinking	Positive Thinking
Example I got a low grade on a test.	I’m not smart. I will never understand this stuff.	I started studying too late. I’ll start studying earlier next time so I can get a better grade.

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion, unlike self-esteem, is more than accepting or even liking yourself. It means being kind to yourself and treating yourself with the same compassion and love you'd treat a best friend.

Rate your self-compassion.

Yes No

- Do you avoid criticizing yourself when you make a mistake?
- When you're stressed, do you take time to relax/recharge?
- Do you accept that you're not perfect?
- Are you patient with yourself when you're learning something new?
- Do you treat your own feelings with the same patience and love with which you treat your best friend's feelings?

Give yourself 1 point for every "Yes." Your Score _____

4-5 points: You're taking good care of yourself. Keep it up!

2-3 points: Try to show yourself a little more compassion.

0-1 point: Go easier on yourself! Treat yourself more like you'd treat a friend or family member.

Write a note to yourself.

In your note, include some kind, encouraging words—words that will lift you up and make your day better.

Wellness

You take care of your physical health by eating healthy, exercising, and going to the doctor. But wellness means more than taking care of your physical health. It also means taking time for mindfulness and relaxation. It's doing things that help you stay calm, happy, and healthy—things like meditating, yoga, and journaling. *To keep you feeling your best, schedule at least one physical and/or mental wellness activity every day.*

Schedule your wellness activities.

Write a physical or mental wellness activity for each day in the boxes below. Also write down the approximate times you plan to do them.

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

Positive Affirmations

What is a positive affirmation?

A positive affirmation is simply a short phrase you repeat to yourself that brings you to a place of calm. You can use your affirmation when you're feeling stressed, upset, distracted, or when you're meditating or practicing mindfulness. Here are some examples.

I am enough. I am doing my best. I can do this.

I am grateful. I believe in me. I am strong.

I am in charge. I am calm. I can rise above.

I am proud of myself. I am lovable and capable.

I am not afraid. I can take care of myself.

I don't need to be perfect. I am beautiful.

Which of these affirmations resonate with you?

Choose at least one affirmation that is meaningful to you. Write it below, say it in your mind, and keep it with you. If none of the above affirmations speak to you, write one of your own.

“Make your heart like a lake with a calm, still surface and great depths of kindness.” Lao Tzu