

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

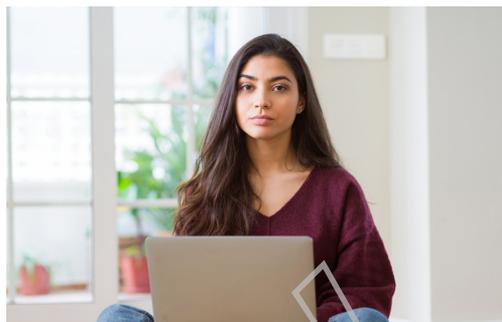
"I" statements describe a problem from your point of view, rather than assigning blame or being aggressive. For example, saying, *"I'm upset because you didn't tell me you'd be late,"* is better than saying, *"You are never on time."*

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.



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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