Taking Care of Your
Mental Health

Activities and videos to help you take care of your mental health and feel better, stronger, and more confident

Understanding mental health

Mental health refers to your social, emotional, and psychological well-being. Just as it's important to take care of your physical health, it's also important to take care of your mental health.

While your mental health can be impacted by some things you can't control, *you can control how well you look after your mental health.*

Why take care of your mental health?

Your 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.

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

Your 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.

Think about it. Write about a time your mental health helped or hindered your ability to reach a goal, or about a time your mood/emotions affected your relationship with another person (for better or for worse).

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How to take care of your mental health

Taking care of your mental health is about doing things that help you stay calm, happy, and healthy. Maybe it's listening to soft music, taking a walk, or working on a hobby—or maybe it's meditating, doing yoga, or journaling. It's also about taking time to recharge your batteries each day—taking time to rest, relax, and reflect.

Taking care of your mental health also means reaching out for help when you need it.

Think about your mental health

So how do you know if you're just in a "bad mood" or if you need to reach out and talk to someone?

Answering the following questions may give you some idea.

	Yes	No
Do you often feel sad for more than a day or two?	☐	☐
Do you have trouble sleeping?	☐	☐
Do you often feel frustrated, angry, or nervous?	☐	☐
Do you get a lot of headaches or stomachaches?	☐	☐
Do you have a hard time relaxing?	☐	☐
Do you eat too much or too little?	☐	☐
Do you often feel dread or panic?	☐	☐

How many did you check "Yes?"_____

Answering "Yes" to any of the above can be an indicator that you need to pay more attention to your mental health.

Regardless of how you answered the above questions, the tips on the next few pages will help you manage stress and anxiety, and improve your mental health.

Dealing with stress & anxiety

There are a number of mental health issues that cause young people to feel less than their best; however, the two that are the most common are stress and anxiety.

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

There are lots of things that cause people stress and/or anxiety, and the causes vary from person to person. Some things, like the pandemic, cause widespread stress and anxiety—but often for different reasons. For example, many students felt a great deal of stress and anxiety dealing with their school being closed, having activities and social functions canceled, and struggling to learn remotely.

While there are often situations, like the pandemic, that we can't control, we can take steps to reduce the stress and anxiety we feel.

Dealing with stress

Problems with friends...pressure to achieve...problems at home. These are just a few of the things that cause many young people stress.

Stress is your body's reaction to change, demands, or difficult situations. Dealing with stress is a part of everyday life, but too much stress can have a negative impact on your life.

One way to deal with stress is to identify what stresses you out, and to then figure out how to deal with it in a positive way. Coming up with a plan will also help you feel empowered and less overwhelmed.

What is one thing that stresses you out? How do you deal with it?

Feeling stressed? Watch this quick video.

VIDEO

Dealing with anxiety

The start of a new school year, waiting to hear if you passed a test, made the team, or got the job—all of these things can make you feel nervous and anxious.

Occasional anxiety is something we all experience. It's a natural reaction to events or situations that we find frightening or stressful.

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 situation that caused it is over or the problem is resolved. For some, however, anxiety is a persistent problem.

The best way to deal with anxiety is to have a toolbox of calming techniques. *The best calming technique is deep breathing.*

Give it a try! 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 several times.

Now try adding visualization. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and imagine a relaxing scene, adding as many details as you can.

What did your relaxing scene look like?

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For more on dealing with anxiety, watch this quick video.

VIDEO

Use meditation to deal with stress and anxiety.

Meditation can help you feel calm, even when you're feeling anxious or stressed. 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!*

Improving your mental health

Here are some ways that you can improve your mental health and feel better.

Take care of mind and body.

There is a strong connection between mind and body. If you don't feel good, your mood will be affected—and if you're angry, upset, or sad, it can affect how you feel physically.

Getting plenty of sleep, eating healthy, and getting regular exercise will help you keep your mind and body healthy and strong.

Do you get enough sleep each night? ☐ Yes ☑ Sometimes ☐ Hardly ever

How healthy is your diet? ☐ I eat healthy ☐ It's ok ☐ It's not so healthy

Are you physically active? ☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes ☑ Hardly ever

What can you do to take better care of your mind and body?

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Be grateful.

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

What is something you are grateful for now?_____

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Help someone else.

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

What can you do to help someone else today?_____

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Think about your technology use.

While technology and social media can add a lot to your life, they can also have some negative effects on your mental health. To know if you have healthy or unhealthy technology habits, ask yourself if what you are doing online is making you feel better or worse, less stressed or more, closer to others or more isolated.

What technology changes can you make to improve your mental health?

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Be mindful.

Mindfulness is simply making the effort to notice things that you wouldn't normally pay attention to. It's being aware of the world around you and focusing on what you are experiencing.

Give it a try! *Practice being mindful today.* When you're walking to class, pay attention to things you wouldn't normally notice, like the sounds you hear, what the hallway looks like, and what other students are doing. Remind yourself to be "in the now" and to be fully present—throughout the day, in and out of class, with others, and alone.

Open up to someone.

Talking about your feelings is a great way to sort things out. It's also much healthier to share your problems and concerns than it is to go it alone.

Do you have people you can talk to about things that are bothering you?

☐ Yes   ☐ Not really

Is there anything now that you'd like to talk to someone about?

☐ Yes   ☐ Maybe   ☐ No

If you're struggling with something, or you'd just like to feel better, reach out and talk to someone you trust—a family member, teacher, counselor, spiritual leader, or family doctor. They can help!

Want to improve your mental health? Watch this quick video.

VIDEO

Know that you are worth caring for.

Write some kind, encouraging words to yourself—words that will lift you up and make you feel better when you're feeling down.

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Want to feel better about yourself? Watch this quick video.

VIDEO

Mental Health Resources

Taking care of your mental health is important, and needing help is not a sign of weakness. If you are experiencing mental health issues, please talk to someone. The following resources can also be useful.

▶ **MentalHealth.gov** will provide you with lots of excellent information on mental health.

▶ Apps like **Calm**, **SuperBetter**, **Moodpath**, and **Pacifica** are great places to start if you're interested in learning about and improving your mental health. But remember, they are not a substitute for professional mental health care.

▶ **If you're having thoughts of suicide...**
call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255,
chat online at SuicidePreventionLifeline.org, or
text HOME to Crisis Text Line at 741741.

"Be strong enough to stand alone, smart enough to know when you need help, and brave enough to ask for it." Ziad Abdelnour