



Parent/Caregiver Handout

INTRODUCTION

Recently, your teen's class completed a series of four 45-minute lessons designed for secondary students to support basic mental health knowledge and help-seeking. These lessons are delivered by classroom teachers and were developed by School Mental Health Ontario with input from educators, students, and mental health professionals.

In the first three lessons in the series, your teen learned basic mental health and mental illness information, signs of their own mental health and healthy strategies to support it, and where to find mental health support and how to engage with it.

OVERVIEW OF LESSON 4

This final lesson, **Help a Friend**, shares ways to support a friend or classmate with a mental health concern. School Mental Health Ontario was proud to partner with [Be There](#), a resource by Jack.org in the development of this lesson. Teens *can* and *do* support their friends and peers in this way for many reasons, such as:

- Many students have mental health concerns.
- Many students don't know where to go for support and sometimes it can be hard to access.
- Youth often share their concerns with a friend before an adult.
- Even though students want to help their friends (and are doing so), they aren't always sure what to do.

Key messages in this lesson include:

1. How to recognize when a friend/peer is struggling with their mental health

- ▶ There is a change in their behavior that is intense, long-lasting, and having a big impact on their day-to-day life.
- ▶ What is going on is negatively affecting their daily routines, responsibilities, and relationships.
- ▶ They are dealing with their problems in unhealthy ways (e.g., taking part in risky or dangerous activities).



2. Knowing where to find mental health support for a friend/peer and how to connect them to it

3. Acknowledging that sometimes students need other people to play a role in supporting their friends/peers, too

- ▶ Recognizing teens have an important role to play in supporting friends/peers, but they don't have to carry the concerns for their friends/peers alone.

4. If a friend/peer asks a student not to, they need to seek support right away if there is a risk to their safety or anyone else's

5. Knowing how to care for yourself as you help support others

- ▶ Students learn to recognize their limits, set healthy boundaries, and take care of themselves as they help support others. After all, their mental health is just as important as anyone else's!

To better understand these key messages, your teen learned [Be There's 5 Golden Rules](#):

1. **Say what you see:** speak to the facts without making assumptions
2. **Show you care:** simply knowing someone is there for you can make a huge difference
3. **Hear them out:** open up space for them to speak, ask questions, and validate how they are feeling
4. **Know your role:** set boundaries to protect your relationship and your own mental health
5. **Connect them to help:** offer support to help them find resources, get connected, and know what to expect

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT YOUR TEEN'S LEARNING IN THESE LESSONS?

Continue the conversation in your home or dwelling! Talking about mental health with your teen is a great way to share information, reduce stigma, and support everyone's mental health. Here are some conversation starters:

- What did you learn about in the Student MH LIT lesson today?
- Is it easier for you to talk about mental health with a friend/peer in person or online? Why?
- How would you know if a friend/peer was struggling with their mental health? What might you notice?
- Have you ever had a friend/peer you tried to help with a mental health problem? If so, did you learn any new tips in the lesson that you might have used in that situation?
- What would you do if a friend/peer asked you to keep a big problem a secret?
- What have you learned about checking in on your own well-being as you support a friend/peer?
- Are there certain times or situations when you definitely need to bring in an adult?
- If you told me about a friend/peer you were worried about, how would you want me to assist as someone who cares about you and your friend/peer?



WHAT CAN I DO IF I FEEL MY TEEN IS TAKING ON TOO MUCH SUPPORTING A PEER?

Sometimes, when teens are worried about how to support a friend/peer, they exceed their own abilities and boundaries, and their mental health suffers as well. This is one of the reasons why it is so important to keep the lines of communication open with your teen. That does not mean you need all the answers — your teen just needs to know that you are there to help.

In non-urgent situations, when your teen may be stressed, upset, worried, or experiencing other unpleasant feelings (but they are safe and at no risk of harm), here are some ways parents/caregivers can provide support:

- Listen to your teen as they describe their thoughts and emotions. Just listening, reflecting what you hear, and demonstrating compassion, empathy, and validation go a long way toward helping your teen to feel heard and supported. This is also true when they share information or worry about a friend/peer. Try not to judge, jump in with quick solutions, or minimize the concern.
- Inspire hope. Even if you don't know the answers, or if solutions seem a long way away, reassure your teen that you will find a way through it together.
- Review [Be There's 5 Golden Rules](#) to explore steps your teen can take to safely support their friend/peer. Talk about connecting to others and creating healthy boundaries and remind your teen they don't have to do this alone.

For more suggestions about how to support your teen, see the following School Mental Health Ontario resources for parents and caregivers:

- [How to Talk With Your Child When you Feel Concerned](#) (webpage)
- [Noticing Mental Health Concerns for Your Child](#) (info sheet)

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS / CAREGIVER LEARNING:

While your teen learns about mental health, you can, too! Here are some resources to get you started.

CMHO Family Care Centre <https://cmho.org/familycarecentre/>

CMHA Ontario <https://ontario.cmha.ca/mental-health/child-and-youth-mental-health/>

About Kids Mental Health Resource Hub <https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/mentalhealth>

Kids Help Phone <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

School Mental Health Ontario <https://smho-smsso.ca/covid-19/parents-and-families/>

Your teen's school will continue to build mental health and well-being into the classroom throughout the school year. Students who wish to continue their learning at home may also refer to the following resources:

School Mental Health Ontario (smho-smsso.ca)

Kids Help Phone (kidshelpphone.ca)

Be There (bethere.org)

COVID-19 Youth Mental Health Resource Hub (jack.org)



SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

If you have not already done so, you might consider cutting this list of resources out and placing it in an easily accessible space in your home or dwelling, such as your fridge or a cupboard.

Find help in your community through <https://cmho.org/findhelp>

Kids Help Phone

Call: 1-800-668-6868

Text: CONNECT to 686868

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line

Call: 1-855-242-3310

Black Youth Helpline

Call: 416-285-9944 or toll-free 1-833-294-8650

Youth Line LGBTQ2S+

Text: 647-694-4275

Trans Lifeline

Call: 877-330-6366



SUPPORTS FOR PARENTS / CAREGIVERS:

Supports are also available for adults. If you feel you might benefit you can contact your family doctor or go to <https://www.ontario.ca/page/mental-health-services> to find local resources. You may also wish to visit [Wellness Together Canada](#). Parents can also contact [Kids Help Phone](#) for support.

If you have questions about the lessons, please reach out to your teen's teacher or principal/vice-principal. Your school is there to help.

