

Student Mental Health in Action

Help Yourself

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This lesson was created in collaboration
with Kids Help Phone.





Grades 9 – 12

Lesson plan

This is the third in a series of four lessons to support the development of basic mental health knowledge and help-seeking skills. Each lesson will include:

- **Minds On:** an activity for student reflection
- **Action Task:** engagement with the core content of the lesson
- **Consolidation:** activities for students to continue the learning
- **Transition:** a brief practice/activity to end in a positive way and help students transition to the rest of their day
- **Support:** a reminder about available resources and encouragement of help-seeking

Note: a [slide deck](#) for the lesson has been prepared for your use. Additional resources (e.g., videos, handouts) are also embedded throughout the lesson to support various activities.

LEARNING GOALS	SUCCESS CRITERIA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase awareness of when to seek support • recognize common barriers to help-seeking • increase awareness of mental health services and supports within the school and community • increase knowledge of effective help-seeking strategies • increased understanding of the process of engaging with support 	<p>Co-develop success criteria with students using the following questions: “How will we know we are achieving our learning goals? What will it look like/ sound like?”</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I know how and where to seek help early if I’m experiencing poor mental health. • I know where to find reliable information about a variety of mental health services and supports. • I know words I could use to ask for help. • I have a sense of what will happen, should I ask for help.
CONSIDERATIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators may need to differentiate the activities to meet the needs of all learners within the class/group and ensure they can engage with the information in developmentally appropriate and accessible ways. For example, consider students requiring accommodations or modifications to engage in the learning and offer choice where possible (e.g., responding on sticky notes, through a virtual tool, or orally with a partner). • Approaches to all instruction, including mental health information, are most supportive when they are mediated through recognition and understanding of students’ cultural contexts, lived realities, and the impacts of inequities, biases, discrimination, and marginalization. 	



CONSIDERATIONS (CONTINUED)

- Be mindful during any sharing that the focus is on learning about mental health together as a class rather than addressing individual mental health problems, which can take time and support. If there is a sensitive personal story a student wishes to share, invite them to see you after class and provide alternative ways for their needs to be met. This will allow the class to prioritize your time together for learning while ensuring that students have an opportunity to address any personal concerns. Refer to the following resources for more information and take time to consider your school and board circle of support and service pathways. Know what to do and who to connect with if a student seems like they might be experiencing poor mental health.
 - [ONE-CALL Desk Reference](https://smho-smso.ca) (smho-smso.ca)
 - [Talking with Parents and Families about Mental Health](https://smho-smso.ca) (smho-smso.ca)
 - [Circle of Support and System Pathways – Flowchart](https://smho-smso.ca) (smho-smso.ca)

For more suggestions for delivering the series of lessons, see the [Educator preparation suggestions for MH LIT: Student Mental Health in Action](#) resource.

SETTING THE STAGE

Remind students of the “ground rules” or shared agreements established during [Lesson 1 – Know the Facts](#). For example:

- ▶ Keep the focus on mental health facts and information, rather than sharing sensitive personal stories.
- ▶ There is room for everyone to contribute, but you don’t have to speak if you don’t want to.
- ▶ Use thoughtful, non-stigmatizing language about mental health that makes everyone feel included.
- ▶ Listen to and respect each other’s opinions and points of view. Value the contributions of cultures and practices that may be different from your own.
- ▶ Share the mental health facts and information with others but keep our conversation private.

If a student does start to make a disclosure during class, you may redirect them using a statement such as the following: “Thank you for sharing. This is important and I want to give it the time and attention it deserves. Let’s check in after class.”

MINDS ON**The Backpacks We Carry**

This is a guided visualization activity available in a video format, making it easy for you and students to use. [Appendix A](#) also provides the script, should you wish to read it instead of using the video.

Teacher prompt: “We are going to participate in a visualization exercise. This means you won’t be sharing any information aloud. You’ll be listening and imagining. The activity asks you to picture all of the thoughts, feelings, stresses, responsibilities, expectations, and so on that students may experience as physical objects they carry in a backpack. You may close your eyes and imagine or watch the video, if you prefer.”



[The Backpacks We Carry Video – YouTube](#)
[The Backpacks We Carry Video – Vimeo](#)

Student reflection:

- ▶ Imagine carrying a backpack like this all the time. How would it feel?
- ▶ Would someone be able to carry it by themselves? For how long?
- ▶ What kind of items might be too heavy to carry alone?
- ▶ What would it be like if we could see everyone's backpack?

Note: student reflections are intended to be flexible. You may ask students to reflect individually or share their reflections (e.g., orally with a partner or the larger group, or through sticky notes or other virtual tools).

ACTION TASK

Teacher prompt: “Everyone has ups and downs, and we all experience occasional changes in our mood, stress level, appetite, and so on. As we learned in [Lesson 2 – Know Yourself](#), everyone responds differently when that happens, but we all have times we don't feel as mentally well. Changes in feelings and emotions are part of life, and usually, we can ride them out and get back to feeling like ourselves. But sometimes we need support. This lesson focuses on where we can find that support and introduces a number of resources, including Kids Help Phone, a national support service for youth that collaborated in the development of this lesson. So, when is it time to reach out? **Here is a good rule of thumb: if you notice a change in how you think, feel, or act that lasts more than two weeks and gets in the way of what you need to do and your enjoyment of your life, it's probably time to connect with an adult who can help.** If you aren't sure if you need help, you can speak to a trusted adult or call or text Kids Help Phone to see if getting help might be a good idea.”

Ask students to briefly brainstorm why they think people don't always seek help when they need it. [Appendix B](#) is provided to help guide the discussion. Acknowledge all contributions and note that there are also things that help people reach out for support, including many aspects of these lessons, such as:

- ▶ having basic mental health literacy
- ▶ talking openly about mental health and help-seeking
- ▶ addressing stigma
- ▶ developing a positive attitude toward mental health and help-seeking
- ▶ knowing the supports available and how to access them
- ▶ knowing many people reach out for support
- ▶ being encouraged to reach out for support, if you need it
- ▶ knowing services and supports can help you feel better
- ▶ having a teacher with a positive view of mental health and help-seeking

Student reflection:

- ▶ Which of the barriers to help-seeking discussed do you think has the biggest impact on students?
- ▶ What could we do to help address or remove this barrier?



Finding my circle of support

Teacher prompt: “We are going to review a resource that can help you find your circle of support. Finding your circle of support means finding people, places, and things that support you when you need them. Your circle of support includes trusted supportive people. Think about how you might identify those people in your personal life, school, and community.”

Student reflection:

- ▶ When you’re with a trusted supportive person, what does it look like?
- ▶ When you’re with a trusted supportive person, what does it sound like?
- ▶ When you’re with a trusted supportive person, what does it feel like?

[Appendix C](#) has been provided to help educators guide the discussion.

Teacher prompt: “A trusted supportive person is someone who cares about you and wants to support your mental health and well-being. They are someone you feel comfortable with and trust, and speaking to them can help you feel listened to and think things through. There are other resources that can be part of your circle of support, too.”

Ask students to share supports they are aware of at their school (educator to have their school/board resource list available) and in their community. Then, share the Finding My Circle of Support handout with students.

- ▶ Educators who wish, may review the school supports available and/or explore the links in the handout (e.g., [Kids Help Phone’s Resources Around Me](#)).
- ▶ Students who wish may use the blank side of the handout to record their personal resources and supports throughout the conversation (knowing they may choose to connect with different people, places, and things at different times, depending on their needs). Students may wish to keep some of this information private (e.g., the people they would connect with, if needed). Should you wish to invite students to share, focus on the school, community, and emergency supports they identified.

Note: Educators should be aware of the historical and present impact of police violence on Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities when responding to mental health concerns, and that calling 9-1-1 may not feel safe for some students. Ensure a variety of options are presented. Educators may also wish to suggest students calling 9-1-1 request that a trained mental health professional who engages in culturally responsive practices be sent, if possible.

Finding My Circle of Support (Handout)

Finding My Circle of Support (Printable student resource)

What happens when I seek support?

Teacher prompt: “Support can come in many forms. It can be formal, like a mental health professional, or informal, like friends and family. These supports play different roles, but they are all important and having a wide circle of support can help us feel our best. One free support available to any young person in Canada is Kids Help Phone. We’re going to watch two videos that explain how to use their phone and texting services and what to expect when someone calls or texts.”

- ▶ [Texting Kids Help Phone for mental health support – video](#) (kidshelpphone.ca)
- ▶ [Calling Kids Help Phone for mental health support – video](#) (kidshelpphone.ca)



Teacher prompt: “Kids Help Phone also has a [Live Chat](#) option available at certain times each evening. You can check out their website for information about hours and how to access it.”

Student reflection:

- ▶ How many times do you think young people in Canada have contacted Kids Help Phone for support?
- ▶ What do you think are the most common concerns young people contact Kids Help Phone about in Ontario?
- ▶ What do you think young people in Ontario say about their experiences contacting Kids Help Phone?

[Appendix D](#) provides data to help educators guide the discussion. A slide deck has also been prepared for you to project to your class, with both videos embedded.

Note: Educators should be aware that a number of mental health concerns are presented in the data, including suicide. Should there be any circumstances in your school community that might make this conversation sensitive (e.g., a recent loss), consider if it is an appropriate time to share the content and/or include school mental health professionals or support staff.

Slide deck

Student resources:

- ▶ [No Problem Too Big or Too Small: Help-seeking resource by students for students](#) (smho-smso.ca)
 - pocketbook for print
 - booklet for print
 - posters for print and digital use
- ▶ [Reaching Out: Help-seeking resource showcasing conversation starters](#) (smho-smso.ca)

Optional educator resources:

- ▶ [What to do when a young person confides in you](#) (kidshelpphone.ca)
- ▶ [Class Conversation Starters](#) for seeking help (smho-smso.ca; version for grades 7 and up, pages 5-14)

CONSOLIDATION

Teacher prompt: “Imagine a friend was experiencing poor mental health and said the following. How would you respond?”

- ▶ “People won’t look at me the same way if they find out I have a mental health concern.”
- ▶ “I should be able to handle this on my own.”
- ▶ “Everyone is so busy. I don’t want to bother them with my problems.”

Invite students to share a few examples of supportive responses for their friends.

Teacher prompt: “With our friends, most of us try to be understanding, supportive, and non-judgmental. We want them to feel better and get the help they need, and we think they deserve it. But what about us? What



would we say to ourselves if we thought the same things? Would we be as kind and compassionate? Would we offer the same support and understanding?”

Note that many of us would never be friends with someone who spoke to us the way we sometimes speak to ourselves. Challenge students to offer themselves the same care and compassion they offer their friends and to prioritize their own mental health just as much.

Wrap-up questions:

- ▶ What new resources did you discover? Did you find new people or services in your circle of support?
- ▶ Is there anything from our discussion that really stood out for you or surprised you?
- ▶ Has anything changed in terms of the way you think about mental health?

Key messages:

- ▶ Getting help when you need it is an important part of taking care of your mental health.
- ▶ Not everything that weighs you down is yours to carry alone.
- ▶ Problems don't have to be big to talk to someone about them.

TRANSITION

Teacher prompt: “Research shows that expressing gratitude can help us feel happier, healthier, and more productive. Noticing things around us that bring us joy, thanking others for the little things they do, or taking time to remember good moments are all ways to express gratitude.”

Ask students to personally reflect on the following prompts. A visual of this gratitude activity has been provided for you to share with your class, if you wish (see [Appendix E](#)).

- ▶ One of my strengths that I am grateful for is...
- ▶ One thing I can do to express gratitude is...
- ▶ One person I am grateful for is...
- ▶ One memory I am grateful for is...
- ▶ One challenge I am grateful for is...
- ▶ One beautiful thing in my life I am grateful for is...

Source:

- ▶ [Mental Health Literacy and Anxiety Management Social Media Bundles](#) – gratitude exercises (smho-smso.ca)

Optional video: Provide the class with a guided practice video to help students wrap up the lesson and prepare to move on to whatever they have next in their day. Briefly let the class know when the next lesson is coming and the topic (helping a friend).

Breathing Balloon Video – [kidshelpphone.ca](#)



SUPPORT-SEEKING RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Remind students that, if they are feeling unwell (e.g., overwhelmed, anxious, sad), they can talk to you or another adult they trust. There are people who work in schools, and in our community, who are there to help them find ways to feel better. Provide them with the resource list and encourage help-seeking.

Kids Help Phone

- Call: 1-800-668-6868
- Text: CONNECT to 686868
- Available to young people across Canada
- Services available in English and French (additional languages also offered)

Hope for Wellness Helpline for Indigenous people

- Call: 1-855-242-3310
- Available to all Indigenous people across Canada
- Services available in English and French
- Services available in Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut varies from week to week (call to request services in those languages)

Black Youth Helpline

- Call: 416-285-9944 or toll-free 1-833-294-8650
- Multicultural youth helpline serving all youth
- Services available in English

LGBT YouthLine

- Call: 1-800-268-9688
- Text: 647-694-4275
- Chat also available
- Available to 2S/LGBTQIA+ people 29 years and under across Ontario
- Services available in English

Trans Lifeline

- Call: 877-330-6366

Note: students may feel self-conscious about taking a picture or otherwise recording resources in front of others. It can be helpful to make resources available electronically on a class or school website. Students have shared that physical copies of resources placed in stairwells or the back door of washroom stall doors also offer privacy.

Tip: Some phone lines are open 24/7 and some have certain hours. Encourage students to check out the ones they prefer.





Appendix A

The Backpacks We Carry Script

The Backpacks We Carry Video – YouTube

The Backpacks We Carry Video – Vimeo

Find a comfortable seat and close your eyes or look at the floor, whichever you are most comfortable with. Now take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Take another deep breath, feeling your stomach expand as you inhale and the air pass through your lips as you exhale.

Paint a picture in your mind of a bag or backpack. What colour is it? How big is it? How many pockets does it have?

Now imagine all the thoughts a student might have as physical objects. Perhaps the thoughts are about lunch, so you picture a plate. Or maybe they are about something from social media, so you picture a phone. Or maybe they are about a part-time job, or a hobby, or friends. Imagine all those thoughts going into the backpack.

Now imagine the feelings a student might have as objects, too. Maybe they are excitement, sadness, or calm. Imagine all those feelings going into the backpack.

Now imagine the stresses students experience. Maybe you picture a test, or worry about a friend, family member, or the future. Imagine loading each of the stresses into the backpack, as well.

Now imagine picking up the backpack. How heavy is it? Are you able to put it on? Imagine carrying it down a hallway. How does it feel on your back? Are you able to carry it all on your own?

Now imagine your classmates all carrying backpacks, too. Everyone carries their thoughts, feelings and stresses with them all the time, and sometimes they can be very heavy. But because our personal backpacks are invisible, it can sometimes be hard to ask for help or to realize someone else may need it.

[PAUSE]

Imagine taking off your backpack and placing it on the ground. Feel the weight being lifted off your shoulders. Take a deep breath in through your nose, and out through your mouth. Open your eyes.

Adapted from Kids Help Phone – for more information about Kids Help Phone’s programs and resources, visit kidshelpphone.ca.





Appendix B

Barriers to Help-Seeking Discussion Guide

Note: Focusing on barriers may discourage help-seeking in some students. **Share a limited number of examples and balance the discussion with ways to address barriers and factors that facilitate help-seeking.** In addition, educators should be mindful that certain communities may experience barriers accessing mental health services due to historical and current systemic racism.

TYPE OF BARRIER	EXAMPLES
Individual factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited mental health knowledge • not knowing where to find help or who to talk to • not knowing if a problem is serious enough to seek help • not realizing that what you are experiencing is a mental health concern • concerns about how help-seeking will reflect on you (e.g., that it will be seen as a sign of weakness) • wanting to handle things on your own • expectations that the problem will improve on its own • thinking support won't be helpful • difficulty asking for help and talking about mental health concerns • past negative experiences seeking help
Social factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perceived social stigma (e.g., based on a group you belong to, assumptions about how you should be able to manage or how strong or resilient people expect you to be, and so on) • experienced and/or anticipated embarrassment • negative views and attitudes towards mental health and help-seeking within your support networks (e.g., family, friends, teachers, cultural group) • anticipated consequences of help-seeking on your social network (e.g., fear of losing status in a peer group, fear of making your family angry or upset)



TYPE OF BARRIER	EXAMPLES
Perceptions of the relationship with professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • worries that the information you share won't be kept private • difficulty trusting a new person • concerns it will be hard sharing personal information with someone you don't know well • feeling you are being judged or not taken seriously • lack of availability of a professional who represents you (e.g., in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, age) • concerns about the service not being culturally sensitive
Systemic and structural barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of time to go for help • thinking going for help will interfere with other activities • transportation difficulties • costs associated with mental health services (e.g., parking, time off work, bus tickets) • lack of services nearby or long wait times • not being able to find services that represent your culture and language

Educator references:

- [Why do children and adolescents seek/not seek and access professional help for their mental health problems? A systematic review of quantitative and qualitative studies](#)
- [Research Snapshot: Canadian Black children and youth face many barriers to accessing our mental healthcare system](#)





Appendix C

Finding My Circle of Support Discussion Guide

PROMPTS	DISCUSSION POINTS
When you're with a trusted supportive person, what does it look like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active listening (e.g., eye contact, nodding) • thoughtful • believe what you say • considerate • understanding • helpful • healthy boundaries • accepting • paying attention (e.g., putting away phones and other distractions) • private (e.g., offering to speak in a place you are comfortable with)
When you're with a trusted supportive person, what does it sound like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listening • encouraging comments: "That sounds hard", "It makes sense that you feel..." • asking questions: "How are you feeling?", "How can I help?" • respectful • empathetic (e.g., validating your feelings) • caring • patient (e.g., not rushing or changing the subject) • focused on you and your needs versus their own
When you're with a trusted supportive person, what does it feel like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trustworthy (e.g., being careful who they share your information with) • supportive • safe • empowering (e.g., sharing resources and strategies, if you wish) • dependable (e.g., reliable, a stable presence in your life) • comfortable • nonjudgmental • authentic

Sources:

- [How to identify a safe adult](https://www.kidshelpline.ca/learn-more/finding-a-safe-adult) (kidshelpline.ca)





Appendix D

What Happens When I Seek Support Kids Help Phone Discussion Guide

This action activity is also available on the [Slide deck](#)

QUESTION	DATA
Since 2020, how many times do you think Kids Help Phone has supported young people in Canada?	20.75 million times! There have also been 3.1 million interactions from their phone and texting services since 2017.
What do you think are the most common concerns young people contact Kids Help Phone about in Ontario?	<p>Top 5 issues in Ontario discussed via text:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anxiety or stress • relationships • depression • suicide • isolation <p>Top 5 issues in Ontario discussed via professional counselling (phone and Live Chat):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mental and emotional health • peer/partner relationships • family changes/relationships • suicide/suicidal thoughts • school
What do you think young people in Ontario say about their experiences contacting Kids Help Phone?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% said their conversation felt helpful for them • 75% said their feelings were not shared with anyone else • 49% said they wouldn't have done anything else to get support • 9% said they would have gone to the emergency room

Note: should students have questions about their privacy using Kids Help Phone, educators may refer to the Kids Help Phone [Privacy and Confidentiality Policy](#) (kidshelpphone.ca)

Sources:

- [Get Insights – Kids Help Phone](#) (data captured from site on September 13, 2024)





Appendix E

Personal Gratitude Visual

Access the full suite of visuals: [Mental Health Literacy and Anxiety Management Social Media Bundles](https://smho-smso.ca) (smho-smso.ca)

PERSONAL GRATITUDE

One of my strengths that I
am grateful for is

One thing I can do to express
gratitude is

One person I
am grateful for is

One memory I am
grateful for is

One challenge I am
grateful for is

One beautiful thing in my
life I am grateful for is



Find out more at:
jack.org/covid



School
Mental Health
Ontario

Santé mentale
en milieu scolaire
Ontario



School
Mental Health
Ontario

Santé mentale
en milieu scolaire
Ontario



Extensions

Extend the lesson for your class

Should you have time and feel that mental health literacy is particularly relevant to your curriculum area and/or group of students, below are additional activities for you and your class.

Overcoming obstacles when reaching out

Where it fits: Finding my circle of support (action task)

- ▶ [How to overcome obstacles when reaching out](https://kidshelpphone.ca) (kidshelpphone.ca)
- ▶ Ask students to imagine someone who isn't sure what to say to reach out for support. What words would they suggest? Ask them to generate examples of how a young person could start the conversation.

Q&A with a crisis responder

Where it fits: What happens when I seek support? (action task)

- ▶ Texting for support? [Read this Q&A with a Crisis Responder](https://kidshelpphone.ca) (kidshelpphone.ca)
- ▶ Invite students to share what they think the role of a crisis responder would be like. Could they see themselves in the role? Have any of them considered becoming a crisis responder in the future?

Note: to assist you in extending and reinforcing the concepts shared in this lesson, all classroom resources mentioned in this lesson have been organized into readily accessible links you can access: [Classroom Resources](#)

Extend your learning as an educator

Mental health and well-being aren't just important during a few days or lessons a year. They are important all year long. **Look for opportunities to integrate well-being and mental health literacy into course content.** Health and physical education provide a natural connection, but they are not the only place for students to learn about mental health and well-being. Many novels also offer obvious links. Perhaps a creative writing project could provide opportunities. Or does the character trait or virtue of the month connect to well-being? Could you look at brain chemistry or structure and mental health within a science course? Or maybe a math course provides a chance to examine mental health statistics. There are many ways to embed well-being into the work students do every day. [Learn more about how Student MH LIT connects to specific curriculum strands.](#)



Here are some additional ways to continue to bring well-being into your classroom and school.

LEARN	GROW	PARTNER	EXTEND
<p>Take your learning deeper with the educator mental health literacy course developed collaboratively by mental health professionals and educators. It's free and available online.</p>	<p>Student voice indicates that the majority of students are not currently involved in mental health leadership initiatives at their schools, but most would like to be. Students also suggested including and celebrating different leadership styles and emphasized the importance of diverse representation in leadership positions.</p> <p>HearNowON Student voice summary of findings</p> <p>Consider the opportunities in your school. Could you start a well-being club or student mental health leadership team? Student voice and participation are great ways to ensure well-being initiatives are engaging and meet the needs of your school community.</p>	<p>Take full advantage of your professional support services school team, if one is available. Professional support services staff can help you identify well-being priorities, resources, and supports; they can provide professional learning opportunities, such as lunch and learns; and they can partner with you in the delivery of programs. Have a conversation with your school team about the full range of supports and services they offer.</p>	<p>Continue to bring mental health and well-being into your classroom. There are a variety of resources available to assist you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayfinder





Take care of yourself – educator mental health matters

The mental health and well-being of students, staff, and families are inextricably linked. Prioritize your own wellness and mental health, alongside that of students. Personal wellness looks different for each of us. There is no one way to maintain balance in the face of the many challenges and demands we all experience at times. Taking time for you, to engage in well-being practices and maintain connections that help you to feel well, is so very important, and sets an excellent example for students.

- [Personal Resiliency Tips – Take Care of Yourself](https://smso-smso.ca)
(smso-smso.ca)

If you feel you could benefit from support for your own mental health and well-being, connect with:

- ▶ Get medical advice:
 - Contact your family doctor, [Health811](https://health811.ca) (call 811 to connect to health care 24/7), or go to your nearest hospital
- ▶ Look into your board Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- ▶ Learn more about services in your area:
 - [Connex Ontario](https://www.connexontario.ca) (call 1-866-531-2600)
 - [Ontario 211](https://www.ontario211.ca) Community and Social Services Help Line (call or text 211)

For crisis support:

- ▶ [Suicide Crisis Helpline](https://www.suicidecrisis.ca) (call or text 988)

