

MY CIRCLE OF SUPPORT EDUCATOR GUIDE

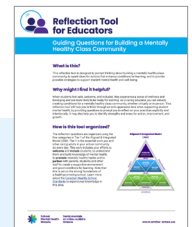
The people, places, and things that support me when I need it



The MY CIRCLE OF SUPPORT student resource is designed to build student familiarity and confidence with help-seeking. It is intended for use with junior students and is also appropriate for students in older grades – particularly those who might benefit from simplified text and vocabulary and the inclusion of visuals.

The resource may be shared on its own; however, it may offer richer connections for students if it is introduced through a supportive conversation. This discussion guide offers a place to **start the conversation**, some **considerations** and **supportive resources**. It also provides an opportunity to tailor the discussion to the unique needs and identities of students, and your school and community. Reflect on the following questions:

- When considering and centering the multiple identities of students, which supports and services might be most meaningful to students?
- How could knowing students help you support them to identify caring adults in their lives, words they might use to reach out and mental health strategies they might find helpful?



Check out the Educator Reflection Tool for ideas on how to consider and center the multiple identities of students. smho-smso.ca/online-resources/mentally-healthy-classroom-reflection-tool

While it is important to share information about help-seeking with students, younger students may not be as able to self-advocate as older students, making **caring adults** a **key part of the process**. Support students by taking an active role in monitoring their well-being and reaching out, should you have any concerns.

Tip: if you are wondering **how** and **when** to introduce this conversation, it supports expectations within the Health and Physical Education curriculum (e.g., for grades 4-6: Stress Management and Coping A1.2 - apply skills that help them to recognize sources of stress and to cope with challenges, including help-seeking behaviours, as they participate in learning experiences in health and physical education, in order to support the development of personal resilience). It also supports student well-being and mental health, which in turn support all learning.

MY CIRCLE OF SUPPORT



If students think they might need help, WHO could they reach out to?

When students are experiencing mental health problems, they might first consider turning to an adult they trust. Sometimes, talking things through is all that is needed to start feeling better. Students might talk to a caring adult in their **personal lives** or **at school**, or connect with formal support in their **community** or through a **helpline**. If students speak to an adult who isn't sure of the steps to get mental health support, let them know you or another school staff member can help connect them, or that they can connect with one of the help lines shared.

Tip: as an educator, you are not expected to be an expert in mental health. You have an important role to play in **promoting positive mental health** and **building the mental health learning of students** through modeling healthy habits, validating students' experiences and feelings, and helping them learn about and care for their mental health. **You have a significant influence on students' lives.**



MY CIRCLE OF SUPPORT



If students think they might need help, WHO could they reach out to?

(cont'd)

Discuss with students a variety of options, both formal and informal, to help them identify meaningful supports. **Invite students to share ideas about the mental health services and supports they know.** This can help you identify where to share more information. Reassure students that there is no one way to support a mental health problem. Mental health support can look different for each of us. It can look different over time, too.

SUPPORTIVE RESOURCE

These videos help students learn what happens when they reach out to Kids Help Phone for support:

- [What happens when you call Kids Help Phone?](#)
- [What happens when you text Kids Help Phone?](#)

CONSIDERATION

In addition to the list of resources provided in My Circle of Support, it can be helpful to make resources available electronically on a class and/or school website. Students have shared that physical copies of resources placed in stairwells or on the back of washroom stall doors offer privacy – they may feel self-conscious about engaging with resources in front of others.



If students think they might need help, WHAT could they say?

There are many ways a student might start a conversation with a caring adult. A few are suggested in the My Circle of Support resource. Remind students that there are many ways to access help. Digital methods can be used to reach out and may facilitate comfort in some cases. It's also okay to ask a friend to help. A friend could reach out to an adult for them, help them think of a text message to send, or accompany them for a conversation. **Invite students to share other ideas about words and ways to reach out that might feel most comfortable for them.**

How can sharing a problem help us feel better? Talk to students about how connecting can help us feel better. Connecting can have many benefits. For example, we may:

- learn new ideas
- feel heard, understood, and listened to
- feel less alone
- have a chance to talk things through
- learn new ways to look at things
- feel cared for
- feel we deserve support

Invite students to share additional ways connecting can help us feel better.

SUPPORTIVE RESOURCE

School Mental Health Ontario offers a set of [Conversation Starters](#) that complement this learning. They offer strategies to help students manage stress and reach out for support for themselves and their friends, should they need it.

CONSIDERATION

Educators can help create a culturally responsive learning environment by recognizing that mental health and mental illness are concepts that can vary across individuals and cultures. In addition, not all cultures may use the same terminology or approach to mental health. Discussing a variety of words and ways to ask for help can create space for students to find ones that work for them. Offer ideas that recognize and respect a variety of perspectives and acknowledge students as complex individuals with diverse needs.



MY CIRCLE OF SUPPORT



If students think they might need help, WHEN should they reach out?

Reaching out for support is a great strategy for students to help care for their mental health. Sometimes students feel they should be able to handle problems on their own or worry that the people around them are busy or experiencing their own sources of stress and don't want to add to what they are managing. Reassure students that if something is important to them, it is okay to ask for help – and to do so as often as they need to. There are people, resources and services that can support them, should they need it. If something is important to them, it is important enough to share.

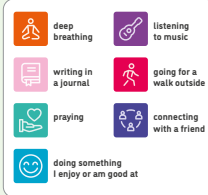
Tip: if students would like more information about what a mental health emergency is, you might describe it as a time when someone is about to be hurt or isn't safe (there is some sort of danger present).

SUPPORTIVE RESOURCE

If you are concerned about a student, School Mental Health Ontario's [ONE-CALL Desk Reference](#) offers an approach to validate how the student is feeling and, if needed, link them to support.

CONSIDERATION

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 911 may not feel safe for all students and families. Ensure the variety of options offered within the My Circle of Support resource are presented.



STRATEGIES to support mental health

We all use and need different activities and strategies to support our mental health and well-being. What works will be different for everyone, and what works can change over time, too.

Invite students to reflect:

- What kind of strategies might work for you, given the people who are important to you, your community and who you are as a person (your values, beliefs, goals...)?
- Do you have strategies that work in different circumstances, like being at home or at school, during stormy weather or when you don't have much time?
- Are your current strategies actually helping (e.g., is time spent on technology really helping or is it causing stress)?
- Is there another strategy that might be more helpful? Would you like to try anything new?

Remind students that there are **no wrong answers** and there is **no 'best' strategy**. This will help encourage participation/healthy discussion/debate about different kinds of strategies and why some can be more effective for them than others.

SUPPORTIVE RESOURCE

If you are looking to introduce students to some new strategies, check out this [easy-to-use set of Social-Emotional Learning posters](#).

Note: these strategies can also be used as a supportive transition when wrapping up this or other learning in your day.

CONSIDERATION

While learning strategies to support our mental health can be helpful, sometimes our mental health is impacted by experiences we should not be expected to adjust or adapt to on our own, such as racism, xenophobia, ableism or bullying. When they occur, it's important to use the strategy of seeking support.



REMINDERS FOR STUDENTS

- There are people in our school and community who are here to help you feel well and strategies to help you feel better.
- Each of us is unique. Different supports will work for different people.
- If you aren't feeling like yourself, talk to someone about it. Problems don't have to be big to share them.
- Feeling better can take time. It's a process. Stick with it. Your wellness is worth it.

HELPLINES*

Kids Help Phone

- call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868 or visit kidshelpphone.ca
- free and available to young people across Canada
- services available in English and French (additional languages also offered)

One Stop Talk

- call 1-855-416-8255 or visit onestoptalk.ca
- free virtual service for children and youth aged 0-17 in Ontario
- offers a one-hour session with a registered mental health professional (there is no limit on how many times students can connect)
- chat available in English and French (for other languages, an interpreter can be requested before connecting with a therapist)
- parents/caregivers are welcome to connect to the service with their child
- if additional/ongoing services are needed, a One Stop Talk navigator can help identify them

If individual students approach you for more specialized support, you can let them know that the helplines shared can help them find additional services. Some resources you may also wish to be aware of include:

[Black Youth Helpline](#)

- call 1-833-294-8650
- multicultural youth helpline serving all youth
- services available in English

[Hope for Wellness Helpline](#)

- call 1-855-242-3310
- available to all Indigenous people across Canada
- services available in English and French
- support in Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut varies from week to week, so students may need to call to request services in those languages

[LGBT Youth Line](#)

- call 1-800-268-9688 or text: 647-694-4275 (chat also available)
- 2S/LGBTQIA+ people 29 years and under across Ontario
- services available in English

[RiseUP](#)

(powered by Kids Help Phone)

- text RISE to 686868
- available for Black youth across Canada
- services available in English and French

For more information about mental health supports and services in your **local community**, check out [Find Help – Children's Mental Health Ontario \(cmho.org\)](http://Find Help – Children's Mental Health Ontario (cmho.org)).

*Service availability varies. Encourage students to check websites for availability in their time zone.

