

# HOW TO HELP A FRIEND EXPERIENCING OVERWHELMING FEELINGS



## Grades 8-12 Physical and Health Education

### Purpose of the Lesson:

One of the most common questions received during presentations on mental health in classrooms from students is how to help a friend when they are struggling with their mental health (from the experience of a school counsellor). Therefore, the Stigma-Free Society and Dr. Dana Wasserman, Registered Clinical Psychologist, created a resource to help guide youth on how to support their friends through tough times. The purpose of this lesson is to promote more awareness around mental health struggles and the differences between everyday feelings and overwhelming feelings. Students will also develop self-awareness by identifying their own behaviour when their mental health is struggling, and completing a Written Response Plan.

### Curriculum Competencies:

#### Physical and Health Education:

- Assess factors that influence healthy choices and their potential health effects (Grade 8)
- Propose healthy choices that support lifelong health and well-being (Grade 9)
- Propose strategies for developing and maintaining healthy relationships (Grade 8/9)
- Develop skills for maintaining healthy relationships and responding to interpersonal conflict (Grade 10)
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others (Grade 8/9)
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use, for others (Grade 8/9)
- Evaluate and explain strategies for promoting mental well-being (Grade 10)

*After Grade 10, Physical and Health Education becomes an elective and is divided into more specific courses. However, this lesson plan can still be used in Grades 11/12.*

# HOW TO HELP A FRIEND EXPERIENCING OVERWHELMING FEELINGS



## First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors Learning requires the exploration of one's identity
- Learning requires the exploration of one's identity

## Video

### What is a Mental Health Crisis? How to Support Someone in Need

#### Guiding Questions:

What are some signs that someone is in a mental health crisis?

What is a mental health crisis?

What type of communication skills can you practice when supporting someone in need?

When should you tell an adult if your friend seems to be having a mental health crisis?

What type of mental illness did you see in the video?

What do you do if someone is having a mental health crisis?

Who else could the person talk to that isn't you? (A counsellor, an adult, a psychologist, etc.)

# HOW TO HELP A FRIEND EXPERIENCING OVERWHELMING FEELINGS



## Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

**Preparation: Print off the Written Response Plan below.**

**1) Play “What is a Mental Health Crisis? How to Support Someone in Need” video.** You can find it [HERE](#).

**2) Pause the video** and use the teacher guiding questions to spark discussion.

**3) Go to the Student Mental Health Toolkit** and open Dr. Dana’s “How to Help a Friend” guide. You can find it [HERE](#). Display this guide on the projector for your class and go through each step pointing out important details and answering questions as you follow along.

- What do you do if you see a friend who is struggling?
- When do you need to tell a trusted adult?
- What are some signs that your friend is struggling?
- How do you know how to help your friend?
- What are boundaries and how do you set them?

**4) Discuss the curricular objectives for this lesson with your class.**

Discuss why it is important to seek help from an adult if a friend discloses serious mental health concerns such as suicidal ideation. Share what this might look like. For example, saying they want to kill themselves, saying they are self-harming (cutting), saying they are thinking about swallowing a whole bottle of pills, saying they have no reason to live, etc. Explain that they have the same duty as their school counsellor to report these concerns. A counsellor’s confidentiality rules are the following: “What you say in the counsellor’s office stays in here unless: someone is hurting you, you want to hurt someone, or you want to hurt yourself.” If any of these things are expressed, the counsellor must advise parents and/or appropriate authorities (police or ambulance) to protect the student.

# HOW TO HELP A FRIEND EXPERIENCING OVERWHELMING FEELINGS



## 5) Follow-up Activity: Personal Written Response Plan

Knowing how to help a friend is very important, but knowing when you need help will allow you to be more self-aware. This, in turn, will lead to more awareness of students' friends' behaviour and mental health. Have the students complete their own written response plan of how they could help a friend struggling with their mental health using Dr. Dana's "How to Help a Friend" guide as a reference.

**6) Lesson Closure:** Share some more coping strategies with students and have a printable list for them to highlight their favourites. Have them take the list home and to try some of the strategies. Find some of the coping strategies below from <https://www.thepathway2success.com/>.

# HOW TO HELP A FRIEND EXPERIENCING OVERWHELMING FEELINGS



**What I'm like when  
I'm mentally well**

**What I'm like when my  
mental health is struggling**

**When I should reach out to a friend:**

**Signs I'm in a mental health crisis:**

## **Kids Help Phone**

Text CONNECT to 686868

A counsellor is available 24/7  
at 1-800-668-6868

If you are in danger,  
**call 911.**