

HOW TO HELP A FRIEND EXPERIENCING OVERWHELMING FEELINGS



Grades 4-7 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.

Curriculum Competencies:

Physical and Health Education:

- Describe and apply strategies for developing and maintaining healthy/positive relationships (Grade 4/5/6/7)
- Identify and describe factors that influence healthy choices (Grade 4)
- Describe the impacts of personal choices on health and well-being (Grade 5/6)
- Identify factors that influence healthy choices and explain their potential health effects (Grade 7)
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others Grade 4/5/6/7
- Describe factors that positively influence mental well-being and self-identity (Grade 4)
- Explore strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community (Grade 6/7)
- Explore and describe/Create and assess strategies for managing physical, emotional, and social changes during puberty and adolescence (Grade 6/7)

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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
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Video

[We All Have Mental Health: Anna Freud Society](#)

Guiding Questions:

- What is the difference between physical health and mental health?
- What is the difference between everyday feelings and overwhelming feelings?
- Was Sasha experiencing everyday feelings or overwhelming feelings?
- What were Sasha's mom's suggestions to reduce her stress?
- Was Andre experiencing everyday feelings or overwhelming feelings?
- How was Sasha a good friend to Andre? What did she recommend?
- What is the best solution for Andre?
- What can you do if you are struggling with your mental health?
- What is the best way to respond to friend's mental health struggles at first?

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Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Preparation: Print off the Written Response Plan below.

1) Play “We All Have Mental Health: Anna Freud Society” link [HERE](#) as the lesson introduction.

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](#) under Downloadable Resources. 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 the students 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 students.

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5) Follow-up Activity: Written Response Plan

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. (See template below.)

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. See this [LINK](#) for ideas from a Pathway to Success 100 free coping strategies.

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Written Response Plan Friend in Mental Health Crisis

Signs of a mental health crisis:

How you will talk to your friend and listen:

When you will reach out to an adult:

Emergency Help Lines

Kids Help Phone
Text CONNECT to 686868
A counsellor is available 24/7 at
1-800-668-6868.

If you or your friend are in
danger,
call 911.