

Getting

help

Read *Educating for Life: a guide for school-based responses to the prevention of self-harm and suicide*. This booklet is part of the *MindMatters* resource.

Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- describe a range of scenarios in which it would be important to tell or refer a problem to an appropriate adult
- identify a range of help-seeking strategies
- identify barriers and motivators to seeking help for self or for friends /family.

Resources

- Phonebooks
- Pamphlets from local health services
- *Activity sheet: What If... scenarios* – cut into separate cards, one set per group of four to six
- Bottle or pen to spin
- *Activity sheet: Support network*

How to

ACTIVITY 1: Getting help

What can happen if someone is having difficulty coping?

1. Explain to the students that they will be engaging in a problem-solving session in which they can speculate about what possible actions they could take in a range of situations involving kids in distress. They will play in a game format.
2. Put students into groups of around four to six. Ask them to sit in a circle (perhaps on the floor).
3. Hand out the set of cards from the *Activity sheet: What if... scenarios*. Each group lays out their *What if... cards* in a circle with room inside the circle to spin a bottle or a pen.

Social status

Be sensitive to social status of those in the class. Discuss fictitious or general examples rather than local incidents or personalities.

Don't blame the victim

Be aware that some school-wide practices may punish the victim more than the perpetrator.

4. In turn, each of the participants spins the bottle and reads out the card it points to. The person whose turn it is speculates first about what to do in such a situation, then others help out by adding their views, questions or challenges.
5. When the groups finish, ask them to work out:
 - Was there any disagreement about what was best to do?
 - Which was the scenario most likely to actually happen out of the ones you spun?
 - Which would be the hardest scenario to deal with if it happened to you or a friend or family member?
 - What sorts of fears or concerns would stop people from seeking help or telling someone else in these situations?
 - What would be the motivators or concerns that would have someone seek help or tell someone else in these situations?

ACTIVITY 2: Support networks

1. Talk about the role that young people are often called upon to play in hearing their friends' problems and helping them to get help. The aim of the next task is for them to be well prepared to help a friend to get help.
2. Handout the *Activity sheet: Support network*.
3. Distribute or display phonebooks, pamphlets and local information to assist students in completing the support network handout. Encourage them to work in pairs or trios.
4. Have students paste the completed sheet into their workbook.

Teacher talk: It's okay to tell

There have been campaigns like 'It's okay to tell' and 'Tell Tell Tell' to encourage young people to seek help for themselves or for their friends. In serious situations, no-one should be left to deal with things on their own. When someone is sending warning signs that things are really bad or that they are having a tough time, it is important to tell an appropriate adult.

ACTIVITY 3: Help card

1. Organise for students to design, produce and distribute a wallet-sized card containing a range of helpful phone numbers. Alternatively, make and display posters.

What if... scenarios



Your friend seems really down and talks about dropping out of school.

A classmate who is not really your friend, but is not friends with anyone else either, has started acting really strangely. Other kids laugh and make fun, but underneath you think this is a bit scary, and maybe the person is not doing this on purpose.

A friend has been on a long diet, is getting really skinny and never seems to eat. She thinks she's fat and won't wear shorts or bathers.

Since your Dad left, a brother or sister seems to be smoking, drinking and watching television all the time and never wants to do anything else. You have not told friends about your parents splitting up.

There is a situation at school which is really stressing you. Every day when you wake up, you remember this situation and start to feel sick.

You notice bruising on your friend's face and arms. This friend often appears with these sorts of injuries. There's usually some reason, like falling off the bike, or colliding with someone in a sports match. You think that maybe your friend gets hit at home.

Your friend says s/he'd be better off if s/he ran away. You've let your friend stay at your house a lot lately.

Someone in your class has started smoking marijuana before school every day. Those friends who smoke with this person do it occasionally on the weekends. People are joking about how s/he is behaving. This person seems pretty down to you.

Your friend has started taking medicines and pills at school, and asks other people for painkillers all the time.

A kid in your class gets completely ignored or occasionally teased. No-one will ever be seen talking to this person. The teachers don't notice as no-one does anything to this kid when teachers are around.

A friend has started skipping a lot of school and seems pretty down.

Your friend has a parent with a mental illness. From time to time when the parent is unwell, your friend has to do everything at home. None of your friends know this situation. Your friend doesn't even know that you know. Your Mum found out through a neighbour.



Support network



Who could you go to if you or a friend had a problem to do with:

- money • family conflict • drugs or alcohol • pregnancy or sexuality questions • study stress • housing • the law or police
- friendship breakups • physical health • mental health (like feeling really down)

You might seek help from: family • friends • school teacher or counsellor • doctor • nurse • community health worker

- a phone-in help-line • priest/minister/elder



Fill in contact details in this section:

Family/friends: _____

At school: a good teacher to talk to _____

Counsellor/Nurse _____ or _____

Local services: Doctor _____

Nurse _____

Youth worker _____

other _____

Ambulance _____

To phone a help-line: Kids Help Line: _____ Lifeline: _____

Kids Help Line and Lifeline are confidential. That means they won't tell anyone. They will believe you. They won't be shocked, they hear thousands of calls a week and will have helped people deal with situations like yours before. They won't think you're silly, laugh at you, tell you it is no big deal or tell you off. They will believe you and help you work out a plan.

Friends: Real friends care. They can help. You can ask them to help you get help, or to go with you if you have to see someone like a nurse or doctor or counsellor.

If a kid is finding it too hard to tell their parents something that is really affecting them, it can be good to get someone to help them tell like a school teacher or counsellor, friend, doctor, nurse or coach.

Teacher: A teacher you know and like can help you to get help.

School counsellor: The welfare teacher in this school will keep it private, but sometimes will have to work out with the person who else to tell in order to get extra help, or to deal with an emergency, or to stop you from getting seriously hurt, or from seriously hurting yourself.



Getting

it said

Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- understand that communicating concerns about coping and dealing with difficult situations can be challenging
- identify a range of ways to tell people about their needs, fears or problems
- recognise that asking directly for help is not the same as sending hints or signals.

Resources

- Whistle
- *Activity sheet: Talking heads*

How to

1. Explain to the class that they will be engaging with the challenge of how people can communicate if they are worried about someone. Sometimes it is easy to think out what to do, but harder to carry this out. Sometimes getting things said can be hard or take courage. The class will get to try out getting things said, find out what it is like, and what works and what doesn't work.

Ingredients of an apology

An effective apology can be designed around the following ingredients:

- 1 acknowledge what was done
- 2 describe the hurt, harm, offence or effect of that action on the other person(s)
- 3 say what was intended by the action
- 4 state what the future intention is (offer to fix/pay for damage, promise not to do it again)
- 5 say sorry.

Teacher talk

Acknowledge that knowing what to do is one thing but that actually carrying out the planned action is the real challenge. Sometimes communicating can be a challenge, requiring courage and assertion.

Simultaneous role-play

If all students in the class are simultaneously engaged in role-play, they are protected from the pressure of an audience and by the noise around them. This technique maximises both participation and protection. You may need to use a whistle so students can hear your commands to stop and start.

You may wish to intersperse the simultaneous role-play with short glimpses of individual scenes.

If you do not want to run a simultaneous role-play, ask for a few volunteers to work in front of the class.

Option for role-play

Put students in trios with one person acting as observer

Protection of role

Sometimes young people feel freer to give a range of advice if they are 'playing a role' or talking about a fictitious situation. In presenting their own personal view they may be constrained by their social role, peer expectations or may fear ridicule or stigma.

2. Choose a situation and outline it to the students. For example:

Today we're going to look at the situation where there are two close friends. Person A's parents have recently split up. Person A has told B about this, but made B promise not to tell anyone else. Since person A's parent have split up a few weeks ago, B has noticed that A has started getting into trouble at school, not doing work or homework, sometimes missing school, often coming late, and acting stupid around their friends, even getting into fights and arguments over nothing.

3. Pair the students. Ask them to decide who will role-play person A – the one whose parents have split up – and person B – the friend who has promised to keep this a secret.
4. Explain to the students that you are going to ask them to experiment with a few different conversations to look at the challenge of getting things said.

5. Option A

Assign students to work in pairs and write starter lines or dialogue for each situation. Use the *Activity sheet: Talking heads* for this.

Option B

Using a role-play format, organise this as a simultaneous role-play (no audience). Play through the scenarios and rounds suggested below, stopping after each scenario to observe and discuss. Use sample questions as a guide.

Scenario 1: Persuading a friend to seek help

Instructions for first round

In this round person A and person B are friends.

- Tell all those playing B: You've noticed that your friend is under a lot of stress. Person A can't concentrate in class, isn't finishing work or homework, is coming to school late, is getting into more trouble, and being silly a lot in class. You think your friend should tell teachers and friends so they go easy on your friend, and because you're a bit worried about what might happen to your friend.
- To all those playing person A: Your parents have split up. You don't want to tell anyone because it makes you feel

embarrassed. You are scared you might even cry if you have to talk about it. You still hope they might get back together. Your parents haven't even told you why this has happened let alone what will happen to you, where you'll live, and so on.

- When I blow the whistle [tell you to start]: Person B, you have to bring up the topic and try to get your friend to agree to tell a teacher about the problem.
- Do this first time round by hinting.
- Allow the scene to run for around one minute. Stop the round.

Instructions for second round

- Now I want you to try that scene again, but this time, person B, you have to get directly to the point, no hinting – you have to insist or encourage your friend into telling.
- Allow one minute.
- Discuss, using the following questions.

Alternative roles

You may wish to redefine the 'teacher' role as a counsellor, trusted adult or adult family member.

Sample questions

- What were the reactions to the hinting?
- Was hinting going to get your message across clearly?
- Was hinting going to be powerful enough to get that person to tell?
- Would this be the same in real life?

Scenario 2: Telling someone you need help

Instructions for first round

- We are going to look now at what might happen if A did decide to tell a teacher about what was happening at home. What could person A say? We are going to try this out now.
- To person B: You are now the teacher. In front of you is a student who has approached you at the end of class.
- To person A: You approach a teacher you like at the end of class. You want to tell the teacher what is happening and that you are affected by how you feel.
- Try this first by hinting.
- Allow one minute.

What if a student seems upset by this topic?

Acknowledge that some people have upsets in relation to this topic. Invite students who wish to speak to you privately to do so.

Follow-up with a one-to-one conversation rather than in front of the class.

Be prepared to offer referral according to school protocols, but maintain a concerned interest.

Offer a buddy to accompany if immediate comfort is required.

Be aware of mandatory reporting requirements.

Instructions for second round

- Now replay the scene, coming straight out and telling the teacher.
- Observe, reflect and discuss using the following questions as a guide.

Sample questions

- What was the difference between hinting and talking straight about it?
- What was it like to have to start up this conversation?
- What were some of the lines people used to get the conversation started? (collect some of these on the board)
- What would it take to go through with getting this said?

Scenario 3: Seeking help for a friend

Instructions for first round

- We are going to look now at what might happen if A had refused to tell anyone, but B was so worried about A that s/he decided to tell a teacher? How might this conversation get started?
- To person A: Now you are the teacher. Person B approaches you at the staff room door during lunchbreak.
- To person B: You have chosen this teacher to tell. You have to start up the conversation. You want the teacher to know that you are worried about your friend and that your friend won't tell anyone what is going on.
- Try this scene by hinting.

Instructions for second round

- Try this scene again, this time coming out with a direct approach. Just tell, no hinting.
- Discuss using the following questions.

Sample questions

- Which was easier and which was more effective at getting the message across – hinting or telling?
- Why do people sometimes hint rather than be more direct?
- What sorts of reactions were given?

- Are there any other possible reactions?
- How might a reaction like this make you feel?
- What would it be like to be in this scene in real life?
- How could you tell a teacher that you needed to talk, but not have to blurt things out in the corridor?
- In real life, what are some of the things that stop people from choosing these actions or finding solutions?
- In this school or neighbourhood, who can help, who could you approach, what could you say to get things started?
- What would you recommend to a young person who had to deal with a situation like this?

Teacher talk

If you need to tell someone something, it can be useful to do one of the following:

- work out a line or two to get you started
- write a note to the adult asking for a time to talk
- write a note which tells of the situation
- take a friend with you to help you get it said
- ask someone else to tell for you, like a friend, sibling, or parent.

Workbook

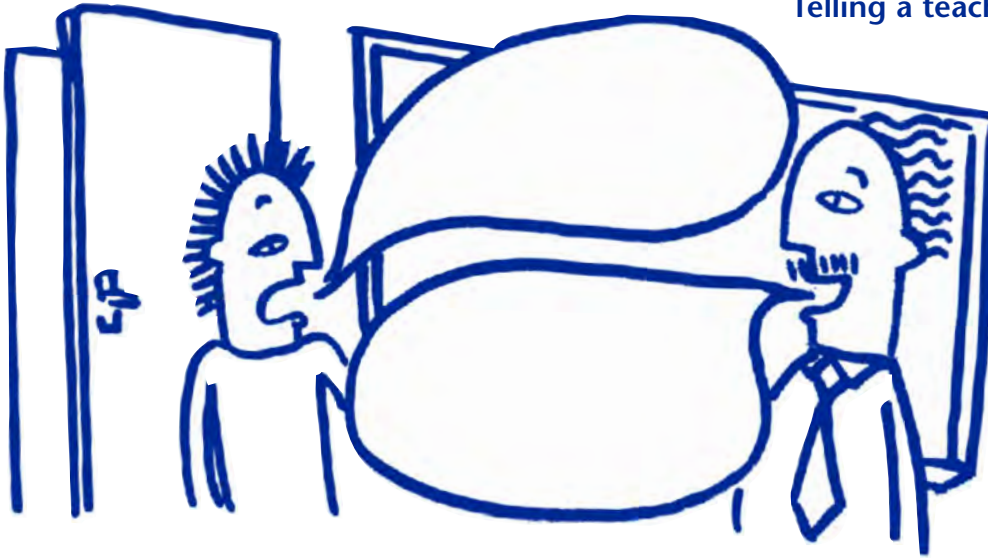
Write down useful lines to get the conversation started when:

- talking to a friend and trying to find out if something is wrong
- telling a parent or teacher you are worried about a friend
- telling someone that you need help
- ways to ask for help if you think you might lack courage, feel scared or nervous.

A Mental Health Promotion strategy

Liaise with community and health groups to provide continuity of care

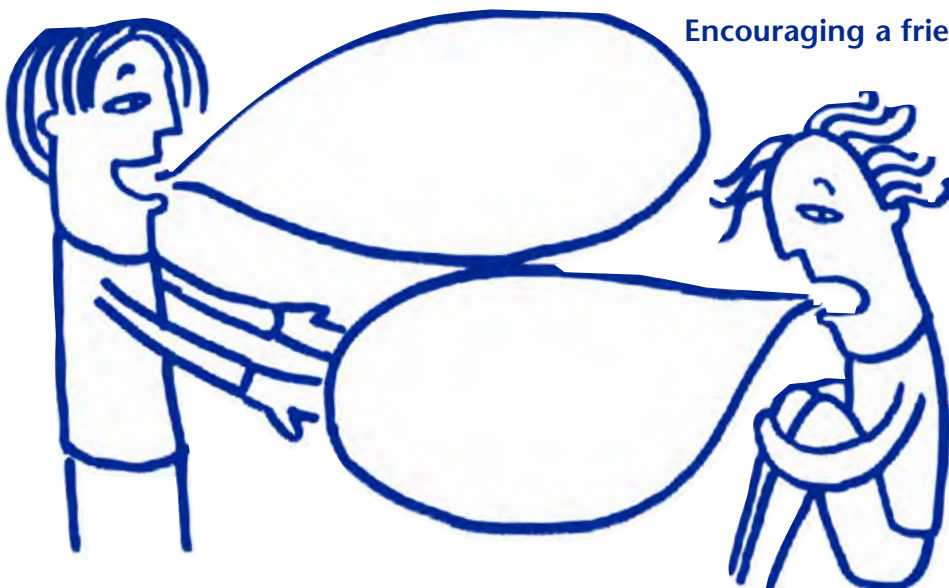
Telling a teacher about a problem



Getting help for a friend



Encouraging a friend to seek help



Is it the same

for boys and girls?

Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- consider the cultural pressures and expectations placed on males and females in terms of how they express their needs.

Resources

- Copy of *Information sheet: Coping styles*
- Butchers' paper or brainstorm sheets

How to

1. Group males and females in separate groups of around four in size. Each group is to complete two brainstorms, one about males and one about females.
 - When males face stress or challenge, the sort of responses it is assumed they will show are:
 - When females face stress or challenge, the sort of responses it is assumed they will show are:
2. When the groups have completed their brainstorms, compare them. Did the male and female groups describe each other and themselves in similar ways?
3. Look at the *Information sheet: Coping styles*. Point out that these are general trends, not individual truths. Discuss how this compares with what the class brainstorms showed.
4. Use the sample questions as a guide in discussions about 'male' and 'female' coping styles.
5. After the discussion, send students back to their groups. Ask each group to come up with one sentence of advice about 'coping' for:
 - a)** the opposite sex, and **b)** their own sex.
6. Ask around the class and have a member of each group read out these pieces of advice.

Research on adolescent coping styles

Extensive Australian research on adolescent coping has been conducted by Erica Frydenberg. Much of this data has been drawn from her book *Adolescent Coping*.

General trends

Point out that the coping styles chart shows only general trends.

Protective interrupting

Is a teaching strategy designed to protect:

- **the person telling the story** from disclosing in the public arena, or from damaging their reputation
- **those who the story is told about;** they have a right to privacy
- **the class members** from distress at hearing a disclosure, or from covert pressure to be engaged in social activities or 'high status' risky behaviours
- **the course and the teacher** from sidetracking off the discussion activity, or from allegations that the course is an arena for gossip or intrusion upon the privacy of others.

Sample questions

- In our society, which group appears to be under the most pressure to cope on their own?
- In our society, which group appears to be most likely to think that things are their fault and to blame themselves?
- In our society, which group is least likely to turn to their friends for help?
- Why aren't men supposed to cry?
- Why aren't women supposed to show their anger?
- If a broad range of coping styles is the healthiest combination, which would you recommend women pick up more?
- Which would you recommend men pick up more?
- How could these changes come about?
- Where do we get our ideas from about what is appropriate or inappropriate for men or women?

Workbook

- Allocate some of the sample questions for a written response

A Mental Health Promotion strategy

Increase staff awareness of school's suicide prevention guidelines

Research with young people has shown that boys and girls use some coping strategies more than others.*

Preferred coping styles of adolescent males and females

Boys are more likely than girls to:	Girls are more likely than boys to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use humour or jokes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talk to others about it – seek social support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use physical recreation, like sports and games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out to solve their problems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deny anything is wrong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be fatalistic – think they can do nothing about it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be aggressive: hit out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • work hard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ignore the problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manage by themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • worry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • act out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blame themselves
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abuse substances, such as alcohol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seek spiritual support (pray)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use distraction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seek others' approval
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • show strong emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engage in wishful thinking

**Does this fit with what you observe?
Why might this be so?**



* Frydenberg, E. (1997) Adolescent Coping. Theoretical and Research Perspectives. Routledge. London.

The 'experts'

Speak

Intention

In this session it is intended that students:

- summarise their thinking about coping strategies
- use humour and the perspective of role to advise young people about how to cope and seek help with challenging situations.

Resources

- A few chairs placed out the front of the class

How to

1. Explain to students that they will be using the knowledge and awareness raised in the previous sessions to play a game around the giving of advice.
2. The game will be played in the format of a television chat show, but with one complication: each of the players will be made up of two people in the form of expert double figures.
3. To form one of the expert double figures, one of the players sits on the chair with arms pushed behind and out of sight. This person is the speaking part of the character. The other player kneels behind the chair putting arms forward to form the arms and hand movements of the expert double figure.
4. To set up the chat show, select a pair of volunteers to be the chat show host, and two other pairs to be the first guests. Brainstorm some questions for the host to use.
5. The theme of the show is *How the modern teenager copes with the stresses of modern life*.
6. The first two guests are modern teenagers. Their brief is to talk about the trials of their existence in response to questions from their host.

Expert double figures

Using the double figure format allows for some sense of humour. If this humour or the physical contact is not appropriate, use a regular role-play format.

7. In the second round of the show, retire the teenagers and bring on three new pairs to play the 'experts' interviewed to give their advice about what teenagers should do to cope. These experts could include psychologists, new age or natural therapists, parents, youth workers, celebrities, and so on. Their brief is to give advice suited to their role or profession. They are free to disagree about what is the best solution to any problem.

Teacher talk

Encourage humour. It is a key ingredient in resilience and can be a bonding experience for your class. Audience participation can be maximised by use of cheering and clapping to start each segment of the show. You may wish to include questions from the floor. Don't allow negative humour or put-downs.

Extension activities

Use the following *Stressbusters* activities in an episodic way across the year to provide opportunities for ongoing attention to the challenges inherent in coping with times of stress.

A Mental Health Promotion strategy



