

UNDERSTANDING FRIENDS AND PEERS

STUDENT HANDOUT

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What's this about?

Mental health is one part of being healthy. The other part, physical health, is perhaps a little more familiar to you – but for no other reason other than people talk about it more. Knowing what keeps you mentally healthy, and knowing what to do when things affect your mental health (that is, your thoughts, feelings and behaviour), is part of what you will be looking at in the following activities. The other part is all about your friends. If you know some of the signs of having a problem that's affecting mental health, you'll probably be able to recognise these signs in your friends or classmates if they are going through a difficult time. Maybe you'll be in a position to give them a helping hand.



You are going to watch a couple of interesting videos and take part in some discussion and activities with your classmates and teacher. You will also have a chance to find out about people in your school and community who can help, and explore some useful websites.

During these activities you may have some questions, or they may bring up some issues that you want to talk to someone about. Your teacher, or another trusted adult at school, will be able to provide some guidance about concerns you may have. You may also like to find out more information from the websites listed at the end of this handout, or choose to contact someone from the support services also listed.

Activity 1: What is mental health?

Being healthy

Sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that health just relates to our bodies – but that's only part of the picture. We are body and mind – and both make us who we are. Just as we can think about what it means for our bodies to be healthy we can think about what it means for our minds to be healthy.

So what is it like to be fully healthy? How does your body feel? How does your mind feel?

It is useful to **think** about what makes a healthy mind as how we think, how we **feel** and how we **behave**.

In your group, look at one aspect of whole body health. Write down your ideas and then share them with the rest of the class.

When this activity is finished you will view a short animation on mental health.



Activity 2: What can affect mental health?

Always awesome

Wouldn't it be great if life was always awesome? Good things would be followed by better things, everybody would be your friend, everything you try you'd do well at, and the sun would always shine - except when you wanted it to rain, of course.

But life is not like that and it's perfectly normal to experience a mix of good things, OK things and not so good things. Some of these might affect a person's physical health and some of these might affect a person's mental health, and probably many of these things would affect both mental and physical health.

So what are some of the things that can make someone feel a little under the weather mentally?



You might like to think about:

- school activities and pressure around school work
- trouble with friends and peers
- family issues
- personal expectations.

In your group talk about what things can leave someone feeling out of sorts. Take a couple of minutes before you start to jot down a few ideas.

Activity 3: Signs and symptoms of mental health problems

Signs

We all know the feeling of being physically unwell. We can feel it coming on – that tickle in the throat, feeling hot, dizzy and so on. And then there are the days of lying in bed, with no energy to be excited about anything.

In the same way, we all know the signs of being mentally unwell, but perhaps we haven't thought about them as much. Your mental wellbeing affects your mind and all the things your mind controls, like your feelings, your thoughts and your behaviour. As your mind and body are both part of the same organism, your mental wellbeing can also affect your physical self.

Have a look through the table on the next page.



A mental health story

In your groups:

- Choose one thing that your class put together in the previous activity that has the potential to affect mental health
- Consider how this event could affect a person's thoughts, feelings, behaviour and physical wellbeing
- Use the table on the next page as a guide
- Take notes of your mental health story so you can share it with the rest of the class.

If this activity brings up issues that you want to talk to someone about, your teacher, or another trusted adult at school, will be able to provide some guidance about concerns you may have.

Feelings	Thoughts	Behaviour	Physical
Sadness that sticks around a long time (feeling miserable all the time)	Helpless thoughts – “I’m no good”, “I can’t change anything”	Stop hanging out with friends	Feeling tired or having no energy
Being much more grouchy, or irritable than normal (short-tempered and everyone gets on your nerves)	Hopeless thoughts – “The world’s awful”, “Things won’t get any better”, “Nobody cares”	Not doing things that you used to enjoy (e.g. horseriding, playing footy)	Having no appetite or having a big increase in appetite
Lots of worry or nervousness	Suspicious thoughts – “people are talking about me behind my back”, “you’ve all got it in for me”	Missing lots of school	Sleeping lots, or not sleeping much. Having problems getting to sleep or staying asleep.
Not finding anything fun or enjoyable, even things you used to really like	Self-critical or self-loathing thoughts “I can never do well enough”, “I don’t look right”	Fighting lots with friends or family	Headaches and muscle pains
Often feeling teary	Unable to concentrate or pay attention	Hurting yourself	Feeling restless
Being scared a lot, of lots of things	Trouble getting motivated or staying motivated	Relying on drugs and alcohol to deal with negative thoughts and emotions	

Activity 4: Understanding friends and peers

Being aware of the signs of a mental health issue puts you in a great place to be able to understand, and perhaps help, your friends and peers when they are going through a rough patch.

Your teacher will show you a video where young people talk about their experiences at school, some of the pressures they have felt, ways they have coped and how they have supported their friends and peers.



As you watch you may wish to take note of the following:

Signs of the mental health issues discussed by the panelists	
Strategies the young people in the video used for coping with mental stresses	
How the panelists helped their friends and peers get through difficult times	
The types of support that were used by young people experiencing a mental health problem.	

After, you will have a chance to discuss ideas raised in the video with your classmates.

Activity 5: Helping friends and peers

Helping out

Typically, your friends and peers are people you see nearly every day, and quite often over long periods of time – sometimes years. So it’s not surprising if your friend or classmate is going through a rough time that is affecting their mental health – you might notice some of the signs.

In your group, discuss ways that friends and classmates can help someone who is going through a rough patch. Use the following table to help you. Some ideas are already included but feel free to add your own.

Afterwards, your teacher may ask you to share some of your group’s ideas with another group.

Things you can do	Why this would help
Make sure your friend keeps up their friendships	
Talk to your friend and ask them if they are OK	
Encourage your friend to talk with a teacher or school counsellor	

Activity 6: Who else can help?

As you have seen in the last activity, friends can be a great support to someone going through a rough time. There are also many other people, websites and services that can provide help and support. It's great to know about these options so that you can be in a better position to help a friend or yourself.



In your group, research the sites listed and as you go take some notes in the table on the next page. Take your time to get to know what the site or service offers.

Youthbeyondblue

- <http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/do-something-about-it/what-are-the-options>
- <http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/do-something-about-it/who-can-support-you>

headspace

- <http://www.headspace.org.au/is-it-just-me/getting-help/how-headspace-can-help>

ReachOut Australia

- <http://au.reachout.com/tough-times/getting-help>

	In your school	In the community
Who are some of the people who can help with a mental health issue?		
How can someone get immediate help?		
What can you do if you don't want to talk with someone?		

Once you've finished your online research and heard about the findings of the other groups in your class you could think about:

- how you could use this information to help yourself or others get support when it is needed – maybe explain to a friend who is not in your class who can help with mental health concerns at school and in the community
- suggestions for action your school might take – pass these on to your teacher or your school's MindMatters action team.

You could also:

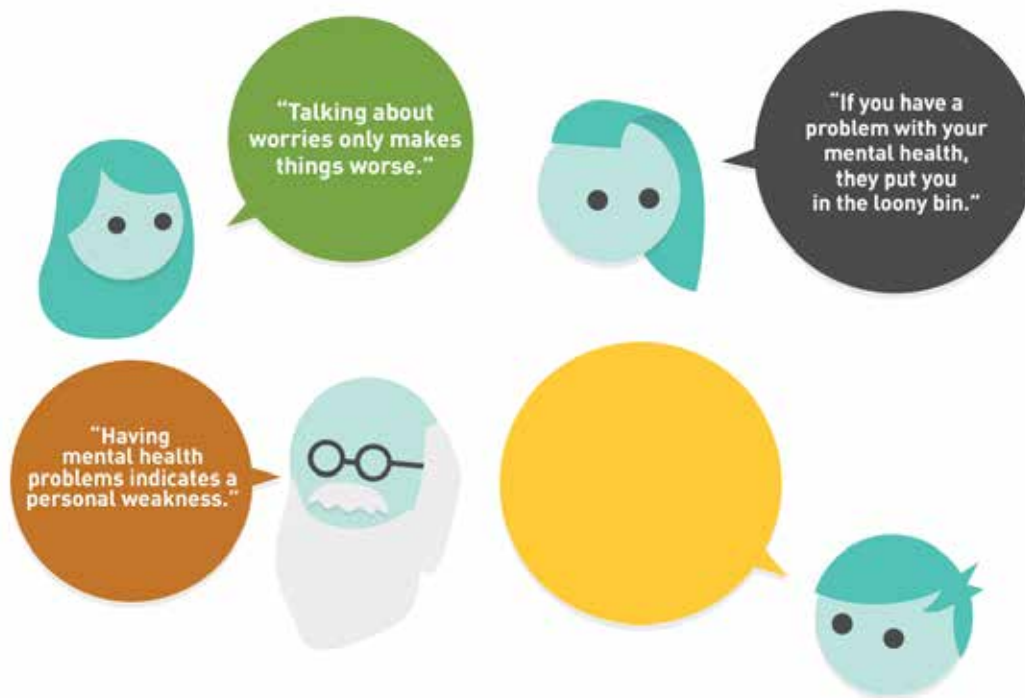
- do your own research to find other online resources such as websites, apps and forums
- ask your teacher for information on adolescent development and looking after your friends.

Activity 7: Common myths

The things people say

People say and believe all sorts of things. Look at these three below for example. They seem to have some strong opinions about mental health. What do you think? Do these statements ring true for you?

Talk about each in your group and how these opinions may affect someone who is experiencing some mental health problems. If you wish, fill in the empty speech bubble with something else someone might say about mental health.



Sites and services

There is a lot of information available online about mental health and who can help. If you haven't already done so, explore the links listed below.

Understanding friends and peers

- Tips for a healthy headspace, headspace
<http://headspace.org.au/get-info/tips-for-a-healthy-headspace>
- Mental health issues, ReachOut Australia
<http://au.reachout.com/tough-times/mental-health-issues>
- Understand what's going on, *beyondblue*
<https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/understand-what's-going-on>
- Fact sheets, Orygen Youth Health
<http://oyh.org.au/client-hub/fact-sheets>
- What are the options? Youthbeyondblue
<http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/do-something-about-it/what-are-the-options>
- Who can support you? Youthbeyondblue
<http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/do-something-about-it/who-can-support-you>
- How headspace can help, headspace
<http://headspace.org.au/get-info/how-headspace-can-help>
- Getting help, ReachOut Australia
<http://au.reachout.com/tough-times/getting-help>

Seeking help

Check out these links for more information about seeking help:

- headspace
<http://www.headspace.org.au/>
- Orygen Youth Health
<https://orygen.org.au/>
- Kids Helpline
<http://www.kidshelpline.com.au/>
- Youthbeyondblue 1300 22 46 36
<http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/help-someone-you-know/what-to-do-in-an-emergency/get-immediate-support>

MindMatters is a national mental health initiative for secondary schools developed by *beyondblue* with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health.

See more MindMatters resources at www.mindmatters.edu.au