

MODULE 4.5

UNDERSTANDING FRIENDS AND PEERS

TEACHER GUIDE

Module 4.5

Understanding friends and peers

Introduction

The 'Module 4.5 Understanding friends and peers' teacher guide is designed to assist you to prepare and facilitate student activities using the MindMatters module 4.5, which can be found at www.mindmatters.edu.au. The MindMatters modules contribute to the ongoing MindMatters journey of improving the mental health of students by building a whole school approach.

This teacher guide consists of numerous learning activities to use with a group of students, and is to be used in conjunction with the 'Understanding friends and peers' student handout. The activities can be covered using a flexible approach determined by your individual school context and do not need to be considered as lesson plans.

Implementing MindMatters as a whole school approach requires the active participation of the whole school community, including students.



Objective

Students will:

- recognise mental health warning signs and know where help can be accessed.

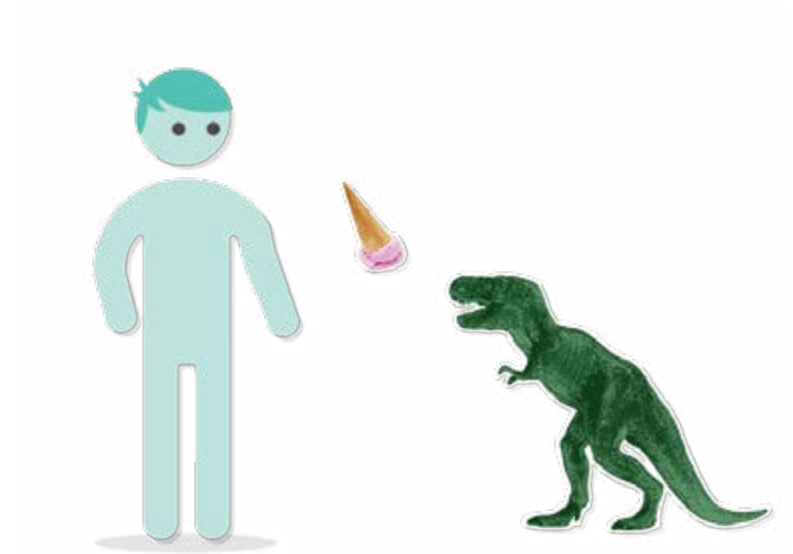
Outcomes

Students will:

- understand the concept of mental wellbeing and mental health problems
- have a hopeful and helpful orientation towards mental health, have beliefs that they can improve their mental health and seek support to improve their mental health
- feel confident to identify signs that something is not quite right, and know of pathways to improve mental health.

Key messages

- Your mental health is somewhat like your physical health – you can have times of top physical health and times of top mental health. You can also have periods of poor physical health (like having a cold) and poor mental health (like feeling sad a lot).
- There are things that happen in life that can have a negative impact on your mental health.
- There are things that you can do to improve your mental health.
- There are supports available to help people who want their mental health to improve.



Prepare

Before you begin facilitating a student session, undertake the following steps:

1. Familiarise yourself with the student handout, the online animation and any background reading and references.
2. Decide which activities you will include and how much time you will aim to spend on them.
3. Check that your school allows access to YouTube. If not, speak to your IT team to get access.
4. Select a physical environment conducive to active learning – students sitting in discussion groups with room to move.
5. Organise any materials needed for activities.
6. Organise copies of the student handout.

You might also like to:

1. Speak with your local MindMatters project officer about extra hints or support for facilitating the student activities.
2. Ask the school librarian or resource centre person to gather together existing and relevant learning resources for use during the session/s.
3. Consider the range of beliefs that may be relevant to the module you are facilitating – issues, students, the school, the local community.

Overview

Activity	Materials needed
Introduction a) Develop an agreement for working together and address 'housekeeping' essentials b) What's this about?	Whiteboard or poster paper, markers or post it notes Page 3 of 'Understanding friends and peers' student handout
1. What is mental health?	Page 4 of 'Understanding friends and peers' student handout, poster paper and pens, whiteboard with illustration on page 4 of the student handout, animation 'Understanding friends and peers'
2. What can affect mental health?	Page 5 of 'Understanding friends and peers' student handout
3. Signs and symptoms of mental health problems	Pages 6 and 7 of 'Understanding friends and peers' student handout
4. a) Understanding friends and peers b) Understanding friends and peers continued	Video 'The MindMatters Panel', page 8 of 'Understanding friends and peers' student handout Whiteboard and markers
5. Helping friends and peers	Page 9 of 'Understanding friends and peers' student handout
6. Who else can help?	Pages 10 and 11 of 'Understanding friends and peers' student handout, access to computers, online access for small groups of students
7. Common myths	Page 12 of 'Understanding friends and peers' student handout



MATERIALS:

- 'Understanding friends and peers' student handout. [DOWNLOAD AND PRINT](#)
- Whiteboard or poster paper.
- Markers or post it notes.



PURPOSE: To create a safe learning environment so that all students can participate in the activities in a respectful way. To make expectations clear to ensure all students can contribute their views and ideas. To encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and be accountable to peers.

Introduction

a) Develop an agreement for working together

Instructions:

1. Ask students to brainstorm and share ideas about how they wish to work during these activities.
2. Individuals can write suggestions on post it notes or the teacher can record suggestions on whiteboard or poster paper.

Here are some examples for agreements for a successful session:

- listen to each other
- respect different perspectives
- share only what you are comfortable sharing
- confidentiality and privacy aspects are to be remembered
- students have the right to pass
- engage in one conversation at a time
- share airspace.

Debrief: Talk to the group about how negotiating group agreements takes time and is an important part of every session. It helps to create a safe and supportive environment, which is a key factor protecting us when we are sharing information about wellbeing. A safe learning environment also enables open discussion for us all. Emphasise the importance of looking after one another as well as ourselves. It is OK to seek help if you feel uncomfortable at any time. This applies for both students and staff.

▼ ACTIVITY CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE ▼




Introduction


b) What's this about?

Read through this section on page 3 of the student handout with the students, noting that a) mental health is only one part of being healthy and that b) friends can be there for one another in difficult times. Explain that the activities you are about to undertake with them will explore each of these aspects further.

MATERIALS:

- 'Understanding friends and peers' student handout.
[DOWNLOAD AND PRINT](#)
- Whiteboard or poster paper.
- Markers or post it notes.

 **PURPOSE:** To create a safe learning environment so that all students can participate in the activities in a respectful way. To make expectations clear to ensure all students can contribute their views and ideas. To encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and be accountable to peers.



MATERIALS:

- 'Understanding friends and peers' animation.
[VIEW ON MODULE PAGE](#)
- Page 4 of the student handout.
- Poster paper and pens.
- Whiteboard with illustration on page 4 of the student handout.


PURPOSE: To help students conceptualise mental health. To closely associate physical and mental health as two parts of total health. To help students overcome preconceptions of any stigma attached to mental health. To provide context prior to showing the animation.

1. Activity 1: What is mental health?

Instructions:

1. Explain:
 - We will be looking at mental health with a specific focus on understanding friends and peers.
 - It is useful to understand what it is like to be healthy, both physically and mentally.
 - The focus on this activity is on 'health' not 'health problems'.
 - 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.
2. Ask:
 - So what is it like to be fully healthy?
 - How does your body feel?
 - How does your mind feel?
3. Explain:
 - It is useful to think about what makes a healthy mind as how we **think**, how we **feel** and how we **behave**.
4. Ask:
 - Students to share a few examples of physical health and mental health.

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MATERIALS:

- 'Understanding friends and peers' animation.
[VIEW ON MODULE PAGE](#)
- Page 4 of the student handout.
- Poster paper and pens.
- Whiteboard with illustration on page 4 of the student handout.

PURPOSE: To help students conceptualise mental health. To closely associate physical and mental health as two parts of total health. To help students overcome preconceptions of any stigma attached to mental health. To provide context prior to showing the animation.

5. Divide the group into two groups. Provide each group with paper and pen and ask them to allocate a scribe.
6. Invite group one to brainstorm and write examples of physical health and group two to brainstorm examples of mental health.
7. After a few minutes, invite ideas from the two groups and write them on the board as per the illustration on page 4 in the student handout.

Examples could include:


Physical health:

- Ability to easily engage in everyday physical activity
- Quick recovery from minor incidents
- Flexibility
- Strength
- Endurance.

Mental health:

- Ability to easily engage in daily tasks
- Quick recovery from minor disappointments
- Feeling good about ourselves and our relationships
- Knowing what's important to us, and being able to do these things (like study, work, hobbies and spending time with family and friends)
- Coping with the day-to-day hassles that life might throw our way.

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MATERIALS:

- 'Understanding friends and peers' animation.
[VIEW ON MODULE PAGE](#)
- Page 4 of the student handout.
- Poster paper and pens.
- Whiteboard with illustration on page 4 of the student handout.

PURPOSE: To help students conceptualise mental health. To closely associate physical and mental health as two parts of total health. To help students overcome preconceptions of any stigma attached to mental health. To provide context prior to showing the animation.

8. Show the animation 'Understanding friends and peers'.
9. Invite students to share what messages from the animation stood out for them.

Debrief: Our mental health is as important as our physical health. Everyone has ups and downs. It can be hard to ask for help but we know that often the simple act of reaching out and talking to someone can help get us back on track. If we don't want to talk to a person there are all sorts of websites and helplines where we can get information and support.



📄 MATERIALS:

- Page 5 of the student handout.

❓ **PURPOSE:** To extend the theme 'help seeking'. To talk about the negative impacts we all have from time to time that affect our mental health. To normalise the idea that our mental health, just like our physical health, is something that goes up and down depending on what life throws at us.

2. Activity 2: What can affect mental health?

Instructions:

1. Share with the whole group:
 - A key message from the animation was that 'life isn't always awesome', that sometimes things come along that affect our mental health.
 - Some things we can just get over like the common cold, but sometimes a situation can be more serious.
 - Sometimes the things that can affect our mental health could even be something that happened a long time ago e.g. losing a grandparent with whom we were very close.
2. Invite students to read page 5 of the student handout.
3. Break students into groups of three.
4. Provide each group with a sheet of paper and ask them to divide the page into two columns. Head one column with 'help' and the other column with 'under the weather'.
5. Ask students to imagine they are journalists and will be interviewing people at a gathering e.g. shopping centre or a local park. **They are going to ask two questions:**
 1. **"What things do you do to help your mental wellbeing?"** E.g. play sport, eat chocolate, go to the movies with friends.
 2. **"What things have made you feel 'under the weather' or 'out of sorts at times'?"** E.g. feeling worried about passing my driver's test, worried about meeting my girlfriend's parents.
6. Give students about 10 minutes to discuss and write down the kind of things that people might say.
7. Bring the small groups together and invite each group to share their ideas.

Debrief: Different things can affect different people in different ways. People manage their mental health in different ways. What one person may find stressful, may not affect another person. What another person uses to manage their mental health will be different from someone else. There are no right or wrong answers. However, being aware of what helps and hinders our own mental health is important and is positive.



3. Activity 3: Signs and symptoms of mental health problems

Instructions:

Note: Before you start this next session, mention to students that although the examples we will be discussing may not be specific to them, they can sometimes raise emotions. If so, let them know that it is OK to organise having someone to talk to after the session. Monitor behaviour in the group to ensure individuals are comfortable with the discussions.



MATERIALS:

- Pages 6 and 7 of the student handout.



PURPOSE: To role model an example from an adult perspective. To introduce the signs of mental health problems within the context of 'it happens to everybody'. To assist students in becoming more familiar with these signs. To assist students to identify these signs in themselves, their friends and their peers.


1. Think of a time when you (teacher) had an experience that affected your mental health that you are willing to share with your students.
2. Share your story, including the signs and symptoms that you felt, e.g. was asked to do a presentation in front of the whole staff group.
 - **Feelings** – worry, anxious, fear
 - **Thoughts** – 'I can't do this, people will get bored, I am going to embarrass myself'
 - **Behaviour** – difficulty sleeping, snappy at family
 - **Physical** – sweaty palms, dry mouth, loss of appetite
 - **What did I do that helped?** Talked to a friend, asked someone to help with technology, practised my presentation to a family member I felt safe with.
3. Explain:
 - 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 probably know the signs of being mentally unwell, but perhaps we haven't thought about them as much.

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MATERIALS:

- Pages 6 and 7 of the student handout.

 **PURPOSE:** To role model an example from an adult perspective. To introduce the signs of mental health problems within the context of 'it happens to everybody'. To assist students in becoming more familiar with these signs. To assist students to identify these signs in themselves, their friends and their peers.

- Our mental wellbeing affects our mind and all the things our mind controls, like our feelings, our thoughts and our behaviour.
- As our mind and body are both part of the same organism, our mental wellbeing can also affect our physical self.

4. Keep students in the same group they were in for Activity 2.
5. Ask them to choose one thing that the group wrote down in the previous activity under the heading 'under the weather' that has the potential to affect mental health.
6. Ask them to consider how this event could affect a person's thoughts, feelings, behaviour and physical wellbeing.
7. Give them 10 minutes to use the table on page 7 in the student handout to take notes of their 'mental health story'.
8. Invite a few students to share their story.


Debrief: Being aware of how our mental health affects our feelings, thoughts, behaviour and physical wellbeing is important. By being aware, it might make it easier to manage those difficult times. It will also assist us in being aware of how others are managing their mental health and wellbeing.



MATERIALS:

- Page 8 of the student handout.
- 'The MindMatters Panel' video.

[VIEW ON MODULE PAGE](#)

 **PURPOSE:** To hear from other young people. To shift the focus to helping friends and peers. To consider strategies for coping with mental pressures.

4. Activity 4: a) Understanding friends and peers

Instructions:


1. Explain:
 - Being aware of the signs of a mental health issue puts us all in a great place to be able to understand, and perhaps help, our friends and peers when they are going through a rough patch.
 - We will watch 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.
2. Have the students watch the video 'The MindMatters panel'.
3. Ask the students to take notes on page 8 of the student handout under the following headings:
 - Signs of the mental health issues discussed by the panellists
 - Strategies the young people in the video used for coping with mental stresses
 - How the panellists helped their friends and peers get through difficult times
 - The types of support that were used by young people experiencing a mental health problem.

Debrief: Hearing about other students' experiences can be helpful, especially hearing about how they managed their 'ups and downs'. Being aware of our own 'conditions for growing' is important. Take a few minutes to think about what you need e.g. taking a walk, playing sport, spending time with a friend. Seeking support for yourself is OK. Seeking support to help someone else is also OK.



MATERIALS:

- Whiteboard and markers.

 **PURPOSE:** To highlight that mental health can be managed.

4. Activity 4: b) Understanding friends and peers continued

Instructions:

1. Facilitate a large group discussion about coping strategies, highlighting their effects on mental health.
2. Encourage respectful conversations – invite students to be mindful of not identifying students by name if providing any examples in discussions.
3. Consider the strategies mentioned in the video:
 - taking breaks from study
 - not forgetting to have fun
 - thinking beyond current issues
 - considering your 'optimum growing conditions'
 - using music
 - maintaining regular exercise.
4. Ask students what ideas stood out for them from the video.
5. Invite them to share some of their own ideas and write these on the whiteboard.
6. Strategies could include:
 - looking after physical health (eating well, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, getting physical health problems treated)
 - doing things that are important and provide meaning – like having hobbies and interests, and keeping involved with school
 - spending time with people they care about, and who care about them.

Debrief: Seeking support for yourself and others from trusted friends and adults is OK. You are never alone.



MATERIALS:

- Page 9 of the student handout.



PURPOSE: To let students know that it is OK to help a friend. To share some simple and 'friendly' things they can do to help a person improve their mental health and seek help if it is needed.

5. Activity 5: Helping friends and peers

Instructions:

1. Break class into small groups of three. If previous small groups worked well and were comfortable with each other, consider keeping the same groupings.
2. Remind students of the stories in the video where friends had been helped to get the support they needed.
3. Explain: Typically, our friends and peers are people we see nearly every day, and quite often over long periods of time, sometimes years. So it's not surprising that if a friend or classmate is going through a rough time that is affecting their mental health, we may notice some of the signs.
4. Have students use the table on page 9 of the student handout as a guide to discuss ways that friends and classmates can help someone who is going through a rough patch.
5. Explain that some ideas are already included but others can be added.

Debrief: We should never underestimate how 'little things can make a difference' to someone's wellbeing. Ask students if they can think of an example that they would be willing to share, when a small gesture, kind word, a thoughtful gift made a difference to their wellbeing.



MATERIALS:

- Pages 10 and 11 of the student handout.
- Computers for small groups of students.



PURPOSE: To provide an opportunity for students to become more familiar with the kinds of people who can help with mental health issues. To provide students with information about websites and services that are available to them. To begin to gather information. To provide an opportunity for students to become more familiar with key sites so they can direct themselves and others if help is required.

6. Activity 6: Who else can help?

Instructions:

1. Explain:
 - 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, both at school and in the community and many websites and services that can provide help and support.
 - It's important to know about the range of options and to better understand how to get help when it is needed and how to help another in need.
2. Break students into groups of three or have them remain in the same groups as for previous activities.
3. Allocate different websites to different groups. See the list on page 10 of the student handout.
4. Allowing at least 20 minutes, have students record information in the table provided on page 11 of the student handout.
5. Bring focus back to the large group.
6. Invite each small group to share a site they found and how that organisation could help someone.
7. Once students have shared their online research and heard about the findings of the other groups they could think about:
 - how they could use this information to help themselves or others get support when it is needed – e.g. maybe explain to a friend from another class, who can help with mental health concerns at school and in the community
 - suggestions for action the school might take – forward these to a teacher.

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📄 MATERIALS:

- Pages 10 and 11 of the student handout.
- Computers for small groups of students.


❓ **PURPOSE:** To provide an opportunity for students to become more familiar with the kinds of people who can help with mental health issues. To provide students with information about websites and services that are available to them. To begin to gather information. To provide an opportunity for students to become more familiar with key sites so they can direct themselves and others if help is required.

8. Students could also:

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

9. Mention that there is a more complete list of sites and services at the end of the student handout, which they could explore in their own time.

Debrief: By being aware of people and agencies we can approach, it assists us and others when we are in need of help and support.



MATERIALS:

- Page 12 of the student handout.

PURPOSE: To assist in dispelling some of the myths around mental health. To reinforce that there is information about mental health that is incorrect or misleading, which can reinforce the stigma that continues to be attached to mental health.

7. Activity 7: Common myths

Instructions:

1. Allow five to 10 minutes for small groups to look at page 12 of the student handout.
2. Have them read what each character is saying and decide if they believe the statement to be true or not and why.
3. If time allows invite students to write their own mental health opinion.
4. Bring back to the large group and use the notes below to guide the discussion:

Some people may feel that there is truth in some of the statements. In this case ask them why, and point out the negative aspects to these opinions that may be damaging to a person experiencing a mental health problem.

“Talking about worries only makes things worse”. Emphasise that there are different kinds of talking and that talking about a mental health problem can be beneficial and is often the first step to improvement. Explain that there are things apart from talking that can improve problems and improve mental health e.g. mental health websites. These can assist students who are worried about talking about problems, or have past negative experiences of talking about problems.

“If you have a problem with your mental health, they put you in the loony bin”. You may want to emphasise that there are a range of ways mental health problems can be improved, and that medical and hospital treatment are part of a broad menu of options available to people to assist them to improve their mental health.

“Having mental health problems indicates a personal weakness”. Everyone has struggles at times where we all need extra support. Just as we would go to the doctor to get some support for our physical wellbeing the same applies for our mental wellbeing. As an example you would never tell someone who has asthma that they are weak or they should deal with it themselves. You would encourage them to go and get some support and advice.

Debrief: Having an awareness about mental health greatly assists in being able to seek and ask for help for ourselves and others.

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