

8.3

HOW TO HELP A FRIEND – SEEKING SUPPORT FOR OTHERS WHILE CARING FOR OURSELVES

This module focuses on teaching students how to notice when friends may be in need of help, and the steps they can take to support them. It also emphasizes the importance of students using strategies to care for themselves when helping others. This module builds on learning from the previous modules about stigma reduction, as well as stress management and coping strategies.

Note: Remind students that the focus is on learning facts and reliable information rather than sharing personal stories. If there is a situation a student would like to speak about, invite them to see you after class. You can also share ideas about additional resources at the end of each module.

It is important to provide students with a supportive transition following mental health learning. A list of easy-to-use activities and suggested prompts to encourage students to seek help are included at the end of each module so students can transition to the rest of their day in a positive way.

CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

D2.4 demonstrate an understanding of how incorporating healthy habits and coping strategies into daily routines can help maintain mental health and resilience in times of stress.

Refer to the Health and Physical Education curriculum document for a variety of considerations to support planning and delivery of this learning for every student (e.g., students with special education needs and English Language Learners).

LEARNING GOALS

We are learning:

- Steps to support a friend with a mental health problem.
- Strategies to prioritize our own mental health when supporting others.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

Co-develop success criteria with students using the following questions: "How will we know we are achieving our learning goals? What will it look like/sound like?"

For example:

- I know ways to support a friend with a mental health problem.
- I know how to care for myself as I help support others.

MATERIALS

- Explore Mental Health: A Notebook for Grade 8 Health and Physical Education
- A computer and projector/digital display
- Sticky notes/small squares of paper (or a digital equivalent)

Minds on

How to be a supportive friend ~ 10 min

PURPOSE: This brief activity reminds students of the qualities of a healthy and supportive friendship. It is a lead up to learning about how to support friends with mental health problems.

INSTRUCTION 1

Ask students to think about what it looks like to be a supportive friend. You may choose to give students 30 seconds to jot down their ideas in the student notebook.

INSTRUCTION 2

Invite students to share their ideas with the class. Ideas will be simple actions like being a good listener, checking in on friends, and hanging out together.

TIP

Each of us is unique. What we look for or find supportive in a friend speaks to our individual preferences. Allow space for students to share a wide range of ideas and encourage students to acknowledge and respect differences.

INSTRUCTION 3

Now ask students to think about what it looks like to be a supportive friend to someone with a mental health problem. Use the teacher prompt below to support the discussion.

TEACHER PROMPT You may notice that the same things that make you a supportive friend in general also make you a supportive friend when someone has a mental health problem.

Things like checking in, spending time together, listening, and respecting other experiences and points of view are all important and let your friend know you are there for them.

There are also a few additional things that can help. That's what we're going to learn more about today. But the basics of friendship are the same for everyone. We all want to feel included and cared for.

BRIGHT IDEAS

This activity provides an opportunity to connect back to the module on stigma. By continuing the same habits of being a supportive friend when our friends experience mental health problems, we are taking action towards reducing stigma.

Our friends are still worthy of our friendship, with or without mental health problems. When we recognize this and continue to be present and supportive, we are modelling acceptance, inclusion, and positive attitudes toward mental health and mental illness, which all reduce stigma. It can also be helpful when friends model everyday mental health strategies for each other, like healthy eating, sleeping, and screen time use.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

As part of this conversation, invite students to consider what a healthy relationship with a friend looks like and feels like to them. You may wish to focus on the idea of balance. For example, are their interests as important as their friend's? Are both able to make plans and decisions for how they spend time together? Are both people's values, cultures, and traditions important? Are both people able to give and receive support, or is it all about the needs of one person? Can you both have other friendships and interests in your lives?

CURRICULUM CONNECTION

This activity has connections to expectations in Strand A of the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

A1.4 apply skills that help them build relationships, develop empathy, and communicate with others as they participate in learning experiences in health and physical education, in order to support healthy relationships, a sense of belonging, and respect for diversity.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What does a healthy relationship with a friend look like and feel like to you?
- How are healthy friendships balanced between both people?
- If you realize a friendship isn't balanced, what could you do about it? Who could you talk it through with?

TEACHER PROMPT "We need to be respectful and kind to everyone, but it's okay to set boundaries with friendships that aren't healthy for us. We don't need to have personal relationships with everyone and sometimes we outgrow friendships. Caring for our own needs is important. Learning who is a good fit for you as a friend is a helpful skill that will support you all throughout life."

Action

Share and Care, Connect and Respect - steps to support a friend ~ 25 min

PURPOSE: To provide students with practical steps to support a friend with a mental health problem while also prioritizing their own mental health.

NOTE: Throughout the module, connections with the previous grade 8 modules have been highlighted. You may also wish to refer back to the grade 7 module series (module 7.2 in particular).

TEACHER PROMPT "Do you remember Tasha from the text conversation about language and stigma? She had a friend named Minh who was feeling overwhelmed. We're going to watch a video to see how things are going. The video demonstrates some steps to support a friend with a mental health problem:

- **SHARE and CARE:** share what you have noticed that makes you concerned about your friend and show you care.
- **CONNECT and RESPECT:** connect your friend to more support, if it is needed, and respect your own boundaries and mental health needs".

Adapted from Jack.org's Be There and its 5 Golden Rules

INSTRUCTION 1

A **video** has been provided to assist in this learning. View the video with students and engage in the discussion questions provided. A discussion guide has been provided to support you with the conversation. The video has been prepared with pauses built in for this discussion. The discussion questions and space to take notes are provided in the student notebook.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Invite students to consider a situation where a friend or classmate is experiencing a mental health problem and says the following about seeking support:

- People won't look at me the same way if they find out.
- Everyone is so busy. I don't want to bother them with my problems.
- What if no one takes me seriously?
- Maybe this is all my fault.

CURRICULUM CONNECTION

This activity could be connected to expectations within Grade 8 Language curriculum. For example: Effective Listening Skills, Listening Strategies for Comprehension and Oral and Non-Verbal Communication Strategies within the Foundations of Language strand.

STUDENT VOICE

Invite students to share examples of supportive responses for their friends. A supportive response might be to encourage a friend to talk with their parent or guardian. Note that with our friends, we try to be understanding, supportive, and non-judgmental. We want them to feel better and get the help they need and deserve.

Ask students to record their encouraging words so they can offer them to themselves, should they ever need them. Challenge students to give themselves the same care and compassion they give their friends and to prioritize their own mental health just as much.

BRIGHT IDEAS

This is another opportunity to connect back *Module 8.1, Mental Health and Stigma* and note that:

- When friends encourage friends to advocate for themselves and seek mental health support, **it can help reduce barriers to getting help**. It can **decrease stigma** and worries that we will be embarrassed, and reassure us that our friends have positive views and attitudes towards mental health and help-seeking and they'll be there to support us.
- There is also **self-stigma** (when we apply negative messages to ourselves). Self-stigma can make us feel we're not entitled to the same support as other people, but this isn't true. It's the stigma talking, and we can challenge it with our words, thoughts, and actions.

It's also a great time to connect back to *Module 8.2 Supporting Our Mental Health – Managing Stress*. Remind students that those strategies can be helpful when they are supporting a friend.

Consolidation

Sharing Strategies and Learnings ~ 5 min

PURPOSE: To give students the opportunity to reflect on the learning and share their ideas.

NOTE: This student reflection is intended to be flexible. You may ask students to reflect individually or share their reflections (e.g., orally with a partner or the larger group, or through post it notes or other virtual tools). Students may also capture their reflections in their notebook.

- What did you find interesting or helpful about what you learned?
- Did anything surprise you? Is there anything you are still wondering about?
- Has anything changed in terms of the way you think about mental health?
- What is one way you can care for yourself as you support others?

TRY IT!

Your mental health matters too! You support others every day in so many ways. Consider answering the consolidation question alongside students.

Consolidation Question:

- What is one way you can care for yourself as you help care for others?
- What is one thing you might do to give back to yourself as you give so much to those around you?

KEY LEARNINGS

- We may play an **important role** in supporting our friends.
- Sometimes we need **other people** to play a role, too. We don't have to manage our concern for a friend all alone.
- Even if our friend asks us not to, we need to **seek support right away** if there is a risk to their safety or anyone else's.
- It's okay to **prioritize our own mental health** while we are helping a friend. Our mental health matters, too.

SUPPORTIVE TRANSITION

A supportive transition from mental health learning is recommended. Please see a list of easy-to-use transition activities, as well as suggested prompts to support students in seeking help within the [Supportive Transitions Tip Sheet](#). This is an important part of the learning and should be repeated each time the module is paused or completed.

PARENT/GUARDIAN COMMUNICATION

You can use this brief to share and continue the learning following student participation in this module.

Appendix

Steps to Support a Friend Educator Discussion Guide

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS

SHARE AND CARE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some words you could use to show your friend support and start a conversation?
- What do your friends say or do that makes you feel supported?
- What makes it easier for you to share your feelings or experiences?

DISCUSSION POINTS

There are many ways to start a conversation:

- "I've noticed... What's up? How are you doing?"
- "Hey, I haven't heard from you in a while. I missed you! How's it going?"
- "I care about you. How are you feeling?"

Students should use words that feel right for them. Any words that share what they have noticed (and stick to facts without making assumptions), show that they care, and ask how their friend is doing are good ones.

Hints:

- Keep the conversation focused on your friend. Listen and ask questions. Go at their pace. Validate how they are feeling by showing that you accept and understand their point of view.
- If your friend doesn't want to talk, it's okay. Maybe they'll be ready another time.
- Don't assume you know what your friend needs or what's best for them. Ask them!
- Things like not interrupting, making eye contact, and putting away distractions like phones can help show you care.
- If you have been in a similar situation, acknowledge that what worked for you may not work for everyone.

CONNECT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What if your friend asked you not to tell anyone? How could you encourage a friend to connect with support?
- What if your friend still doesn't want you to tell anyone?

DISCUSSION POINTS

- Students could help a friend think about which caring adult they might approach for support. They could share resources, like who is available to help in their school and

Kids Help Phone. They could also let their friend know that many students seek mental health support. It's common!

- If their friend still doesn't want help, they can keep checking in with them.
- If they are worried their friend or anyone else might not be safe, it's important to connect to help right away. Speak to an adult they trust, even if their friend doesn't want them to.
- Keeping a **secret** and respecting **privacy** are not the same thing. Keeping a **secret** involves not telling anyone information, even people who need it. Respecting **privacy** means sharing only the information needed and only with those who need it to help. They don't have to share everything about their friend's life.
- Sharing information to get someone into trouble or embarrass them (snitching or gossiping) is very different from sharing information to help someone or keep them safe.

RESPECT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How could setting boundaries be healthy in a friendship?
- What are some ways you could set boundaries that respect your own needs and the needs of your friends?

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **It's okay to prioritize your own mental health. You matter, too!**
- Setting boundaries on things like your time and what you talk about can help protect your friendship. Boundaries can help each person understand the other's perspective and respect each other's unique wants and needs.
- If you're not feeling up to talking about mental health with a friend, that's okay! You can come back to it another time or ask someone else to check in with your friend. We all have days when we don't have as much time or energy.
- Make sure that if you are ever worried about your friends' safety, you ask a caring adult to connect with them right away.
- Students may wish to use words like the following to set boundaries:
 - "This is important to me. I have to _____ and then I'll check back in with you."
 - "I'm not sure how to help with that. Maybe _____ has some ideas."
 - "I'm not feeling the best today. I need some time to take care of myself."