

2017 BACK TO SCHOOL



OUTREACH TOOLKIT

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Mental Health America
B4Stage4

The 2017 Back to School Toolkit has been supported by the Allergan Foundation.

A MESSAGE FROM MHA

Young people today deal with a lot -- cyber-bullying, body shaming, community violence, abuse, neglect, unstable home lives, drug exposure, sexual orientation, immigration issues and more.

And those who are struggling with mental health problems often must deal with them on their own – because we don't recognize the seriousness of the problems until kids begin to get in trouble at school. That's too late, and it often doesn't result in the right kind of help. Mental health problems are best dealt with through health, educational, and social services and supports. But getting in trouble at school usually means adults implement disciplinary measures like time-out, detention, suspension, expulsion, or even arrest.

The real problem isn't that young people with mental health concerns are "bad kids" who need to be excluded from interaction with their peers. It's that they may not have the tools they need to handle emotions like fear, sadness, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and anger – which are often at the root of misbehavior – before they get to that stage.

This year, Mental Health America is offering tools that will make a difference, based on the best research and programs available.

MHA's 2017 Back to School Toolkit will increase emotional intelligence and self-regulation through materials for young people, for parents, and for school personnel, too.

While we can't completely shield young people from all the stressful or traumatic situations they may be facing, we can help them learn to manage their emotions and reactions in ways that cultivate resilience. And we can help the adults with whom they interact do the same.



Paul Gionfriddo
President & CEO
Mental Health America

INTRODUCTION

The 2017 Back to School Toolkit is designed for MHA Affiliates, advocates, and organizations of all types to use with parents, youth and school personnel to raise awareness of the importance of mental health issues that start during the youth.

By using the toolkit materials, you will help members of your community:

- Be aware of the relationship between emotions and behavior problems in youth;
- Learn strategies for addressing bothersome emotions in healthy ways;
- Increase understanding of how disciplinary procedures centered around exclusion and isolation are more harmful than helpful; and
- Access resources for finding treatment and help in times of crisis.

This year's toolkit includes:

Media Materials

- Key Messages
- Drop-In Article for Parents
- Drop-In Article for Students

Social Media and Web Components

- Sample Facebook and Twitter Posts
- Social Media Images
- Horizontal and Vertical Banner Ads
- Call to Action Buttons
- Youth Mental Health: Emotions Matter (Web-based Infographic)

Handouts/Poster

- Tips for Teachers: Ways to Help Kids and Teens Who Struggle with Emotions or Behavior
- Helping at Home: Tips for Parents
- Helpful vs Harmful: Ways to Manage Emotions
- Youth Mental Health: Emotions Matter (Printable Infographic)
- Poster: The PATH to Calm

Classroom Activities

- Emotions Matter: Lessons on Building Emotional Intelligence (including worksheets)

In addition to the materials included in this toolkit, MHA has created a wealth of web content for young people and adults that can easily be linked to and shared in electronic newsletters and over social media.

Questions?

If you have further questions about Back to School, please contact Danielle Fritze, Senior Director of Public Education and Visual Communication at dfritze@mentalhealthamerica.net.

KEY MESSAGES

- Heading back to school can be tough on young people, but you can help them cope.
- Kids and teens today are dealing with some heavy stuff -- cyber-bullying, body shaming, community violence, abuse, neglect, unstable home lives, drug exposure, sexual orientation, immigration issues and more -- often they don't know where to turn.
- Sometimes, young people act out in school – but often these actions are hiding an underlying issue.
- Labeling a young person a “bad kid” and excluding them from their peers as punishment doesn't get at the root of the issue.
- Before behavior problems surface, there are emotions that young people are unable to deal with. Some simply may not have the tools that they need to effectively handle emotions like fear, sadness, and anger, which are often at the root of misbehavior.
- While we can't completely shield young people from all the stressful or traumatic situations they may be facing, we can help them learn to manage their emotions and reactions in ways that cultivate resilience.
- Mental Health America has developed its 2017 Back to School Toolkit to help increase emotional intelligence and self-regulation through materials for parents, school personnel, and young people.
- It's important for parents and caregivers to know the signs that a young person is struggling emotionally and have the tools to help.
- It's hard to talk about mental health sometimes, but the conversation is too important not to have.
- Mental health issues like depression and anxiety in young people are treatable and should be addressed as soon as possible - before Stage 4.
- Young people should find someone they trust and start a conversation. Parents and school personnel, be ready to listen and let them know you understand.

Feel free to supplement these key messages with language from the fact sheets and other materials included in this toolkit.

DROP IN ARTICLE: PARENTS

Use this article in your next e-blast or share with your local schools to include in their next parent newsletter.



We all remember the drama of school and how hard it could be sometimes. And that was before the internet! Raising a child today is hard, it doesn't come with a manual, and often, we feel like we are winging it.

We know kids today are dealing with some heavy stuff -- cyber-bullying, body shaming, community violence, abuse, neglect, unstable home lives, drug exposure, sexual orientation, immigration issues and more.

Kids can be moody, hard to read, and don't always want to talk. Emotions are a basic part of the human experience, but sometimes we struggle with how to deal with them effectively. Kids aren't any different.

Kids and teens are dealing with real problems and complicated emotions. Sometimes they act out in school or in other ways at home because they have yet to learn the right coping skills. So how can parents work with their child to help them process their emotions appropriately and better understand what's going on in their lives, so that misbehavior can hopefully be avoided or addressed?

While we can't completely shield our children from all the stressful or traumatic situations they may be facing, we can help them learn to manage their emotions and reactions in ways that cultivate resilience. Equipping them with appropriate coping skills for when they are struggling with emotions leads to better mental and physical health in adulthood.

Mental Health America's 2017 Back to School Toolkit aims to increase emotional intelligence and self-regulation through materials for parents, school personnel, and young people. Visit www.mentalhealthamerica.net/back-school to learn more.

It's hard as parents to know how to approach a child who is struggling with emotional or behavioral issues. If you are concerned about whether a specific behavior is doing harm, it's important not to ignore it. Encourage communication, let your child know that they can talk to you, provide them with an environment that is safe and supportive. Listen. Try not to overreact. And remember what it was like to be a kid. Oftentimes they need your help, but don't know quite how to ask for it. Be patient, but address serious issues head-on.

By providing supportive environments and teaching children and teens to recognize their emotions and address them in healthy ways, we can change lives.

If you think your child is going through emotional or behavioral issues, MHA has an online screen that parents can take to see if their child is at risk: www.mhascreening.org and tips and information to help you get started with that important conversation with your child at <http://bit.ly/talk2teens>.

There are also serious signs that someone is in crisis and needs more immediate help. These include thoughts or plans of hurting oneself or another person. If you or someone you know is in crisis, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), text "MHA" to 741741 or call 911.

Just like physical illnesses, treating mental health problems early-before Stage 4-can help to prevent more serious problems from developing in the future. Start the conversation. Your child will be glad you did.

DROP IN ARTICLE: STUDENTS

Share this article with your local schools to include in their next student newsletter.

While we all wish we could avoid the academic, social, and emotional pressures of school and stay in summer forever, sadly it can't be so. If the thought of going back to school fills you with dread and anxiety, you're not alone.

As if school wasn't stressful enough, there are situations like cyber-bullying, body shaming, community violence, abuse, troubles at home, pressure to use drugs, struggling with sexual identity, and more that can have you feeling all kinds of feels. It can be hard to keep your cool when you've got a lot going on emotionally.

Knowing how to react to emotions like fear, sadness, and anger can be tough. Of the 11-17-year olds who took MHA's Youth Screen: 69 percent said they often worry a lot, 68 percent said they often felt sad or unhappy, and 55 percent said they often felt irritable or angry. These emotions are often underneath the kind of actions that can get you into trouble.

If you have ever gotten in trouble at school, you know that it gets you the kind of attention you don't want, and generally ends up in being disciplined by through things like detention, suspension, expulsion, or even arrest. You might have realized that you were dealing with some complicated emotions before your behavior got out of hand.

Many students struggle to deal with negative emotions effectively. You may be in denial and refuse to accept that anything is wrong or that you may need help. You may not want to be around people or participate in activities. You might find yourself struggling with self-harm or turning to drugs or alcohol to cope with your pain; maybe you've taken it out on others and become a bully. These behaviors can often make difficult feelings even worse and may be signs and symptoms of an underlying mental health condition. If you or someone you know is struggling with a mental health concern, there is hope and there is help.

Mental Health America (MHA) has developed tools and resources to teach you healthier ways to cope with the stressful environments and situations that you may be dealing with. These lessons are ones you can't put a grade on and will be useful to you for the rest of your life. Learn more at bit.ly/mhabts.

While you do not get to choose what happens to you, you do get to choose how you respond. This school year make smart choices about how to deal with difficult or uncomfortable feelings - and learn why your mental health matters.

Just like physical health, taking care of mental health struggles early can help to prevent more serious problems from developing in the future. If you are concerned that you or someone you know may be experiencing a mental health problem, it is important to take action as soon as possible- before Stage 4. Start the conversation. Seek help from a trusted adult. Remember there is nothing to be ashamed of and that there is help and hope. Don't know how to start the conversation? MHA has tips and information to help get you started at bit.ly/tips4talking.

There are also serious signs that someone is in crisis and needs more immediate help. These include thoughts or plans of hurting oneself or another person. If you or someone you know is in crisis call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), text "MHA" to 741741, or call 911.

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Twitter

The Back To School toolkit is here! Download to spread awareness about emotional intelligence in your community bit.ly/mhabts

Going #backtoschool isnt just for kids&teens! Parents can prepare for the school year with Back to School toolkit bit.ly/mhabts

Heading #backtoschool can create a lot of feelings that you might not be familiar with. Learn how #emotionsmatter at bit.ly/mhabts

Looking for info on #mentalhealth this school year? Download the free 2017 #BackToSchool toolkit at bit.ly/mhabts #EmotionsMatter and so do you.

Learn more about how to manage your #mentalhealth this school year at bit.ly/mhabts

Download the #BTS toolkit to learn more about how to teach kids that #emotionsmatter and it's ok to ask for help bit.ly/mhabts

Kids deal with some pretty heavy stuff. Learn how #emotionsmatter and how to cope with difficult situations at bit.ly/mhabts

Lets face it: smtmes school sucks but your #mentalhealth doesnt have to. Learn how #emotionsmatter & how to cope at bit.ly/mhabts

Dealing with #allthefeels can be frustrating but there are helpful & harmful ways to cope with them at bit.ly/copingtips

What #copingskills can we teach kids to deal with unfamiliar feelings? Learn more by downloading the #BTS toolkit at bit.ly/mhabts

How many words for #emotions are there in English? Over 400! Learn how #emotionsmatter & ways to cope this year bit.ly/mhabts

How do you cope with unfamiliar/intense emotions at school? Here are some helpful ways to manager emotions bit.ly/copingtips

Students who have strong social emotional skills have better physical and mental health #EmotionsMatter bit.ly/mhabts

Helpful vs Harmful: Ways to Manage Emotions bit.ly/copingtips

Youth Mental Health: Emotions Matter bit.ly/mhabts

Tips for Teachers: Ways to Help Kids Who Struggle with Emotions or Behavior bit.ly/mhabts

Helping at Home: Tips for Parents bit.ly/mhabts

Talking To Adolescents and Teens: Starting The Conversation bit.ly/talk2teens

Tips for Teaching Social & Emotional Skills to Students bit.ly/mhabts

Facebook

Getting ready for the start of a new school year can be overwhelming, especially for kids who may be dealing with a range of issues at home and their communities. Young people need support too. Learn how increasing emotional intelligence and self-regulation can be great tools! Download the complete #BacktoSchool toolkit to get a range of free materials: bit.ly/mhabts #parents #teachers #emotionsmatter

Parents/Teachers/Caregivers: It's #BackToSchool time. Get yourself and the youth in your life prepared to tackle the school year by downloading our #BackToSchool toolkit. Learn how emotional intelligence and self-regulation can help improve your youth's #mentalhealth. Download the toolkit: bit.ly/mhabts

Are you prepared for the school year? We are! Make sure to download the free 2017 #BackToSchool toolkit focused on increasing emotional intelligence and self-regulation at bit.ly/mhabts #parents #teachers

Dealing with unfamiliar or intense emotions can be tough, especially at school. Learn some helpful ways to manage your emotions with our #BackToSchool toolkit: bit.ly/mhabts

Did you know that students who have strong social emotional skills have better physical and mental health? They are all related, learn how your emotional intelligence can be a life changer for you and your community bit.ly/mhabts #EmotionsMatter #themoreyouknow #geteducated

What do your emotions have to do with #mentalhealth? Everything. #EmotionsMatter and so do you. Learn more about how to manage your #mentalhealth this school year at bit.ly/mhabts

What #copingskills are the youth in your life using to deal with unfamiliar feelings? Need some info on how #copingskills can help #mentalhealth? Download the #BacktoSchool toolkit to learn more and how to teach kids that #emotionsmatter bit.ly/mhabts

Kids and teens today are dealing with some heavy stuff -- cyber-bullying, body shaming, community violence, abuse, neglect, unstable home lives, drug exposure, sexual orientation, immigration issues and more. Don't be unprepared. Learn how #emotionsmatter and how to help them cope with difficult situations at bit.ly/mhabts #backtoschool #parents #teachers

While we can't completely shield young people from all the stressful or traumatic situations they may be facing, we can help them learn to manage their emotions and reactions in ways that cultivate resilience. Learn how you can help the young people in your life by downloading the #BacktoSchool toolkit bit.ly/mhabts

Some children may not have the tools that they need to effectively handle emotions like fear, sadness, and anger, which are often at the root of misbehavior. Download the #BTS toolkit to learn more about how to teach our kids that #emotionsmatter and it's ok to ask for help bit.ly/mhabts #backtoschool #parents #teachers

IMAGES/INFOGRAPHIC

Download and save the images provided for use on your social media platforms or websites. All images (including social media profile and cover pics, screening buttons and the infographic) can be downloaded by visiting mentalhealthamerica.net/back-school-2017-toolkit-download, then right-clicking on the image and selecting "Save image as."

Vertical Banner



Infographic



Facebook or Twitter Cover Images



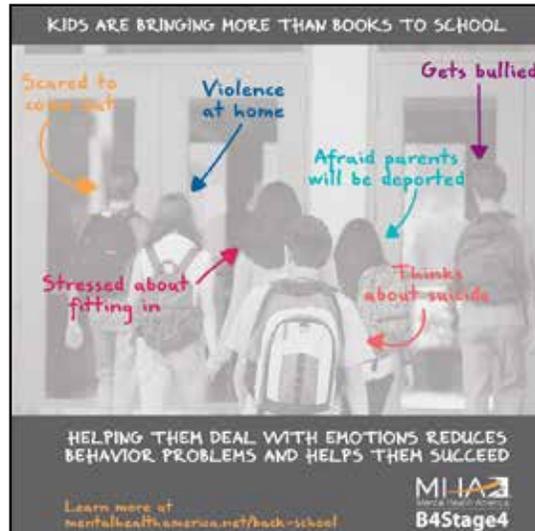
Horizontal Banner



Shareable Images

(Formatted for Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram)

Call-to-Action Images



TIPS FOR TEACHERS: WAYS TO HELP KIDS AND TEENS WHO STRUGGLE WITH EMOTIONS OR BEHAVIOR



Start fresh.

Other teachers may see your class roster and warn you about a particular student, but if what they have to say is negative it can taint your perception of that student before you have even met them. If you see a conversation starting to go this way, reframe it in a positive light. Ask what worked best, or what that teacher would have done differently if they got to do it over. It's up to you to develop your own relationship with that student.

Draw on past experiences with students, but don't rely on them.

The start of the school year brings a fresh crop of children and teenagers with different backgrounds, personalities, and problems. Think about techniques that worked last year for dealing with some of your "difficult" students, but stay open to new approaches.



CAN I THINK ABOUT THIS DIFFERENTLY?



Put yourself in the right frame of mind.

Most students who have emotional or behavioral problems want to be successful in school, but have trouble controlling themselves, focusing, and staying still. Avoid deeming them "attention seekers," or "slackers." Work on being as patient as possible.

Expect some disorganization and forgetfulness.

Children who are sad, angry, or afraid are probably not too concerned about missing papers or homework assignments. Of 11-17-year olds who took MHA's Youth Screening, 92 percent reported that they sometimes or often had trouble concentrating, and 91 percent reported that they were sometimes or often easily distracted. If your workload allows, it might be helpful to email homework assignments to parents to keep kids on task, or provide written directions instead of verbal ones so students can refer back to them. If you are using technology in the classroom, use the reminder or task tools that are available.





Reduce classroom stress.

Avoid rigid deadlines – try giving homework assignments that are due in two days instead of the following day. Don't lower grades for non-academic reasons like messy handwriting, especially with younger children. Think of ways to gamify your lessons from time to time so they are more engaging for students who struggle to focus.

Look into programs that support social & emotional learning.

MHA recommends evidence-based programs like the Pax Good Behavior Game (especially for younger students), the Positive Action Program, and the Raising Healthy Children Program. These programs use social and emotional learning to deliver outcomes that matter later in life such as less crime, lower rates of public assistance, improved employment opportunities, and higher earning potential. Furthermore, they have demonstrated considerable return on investment.

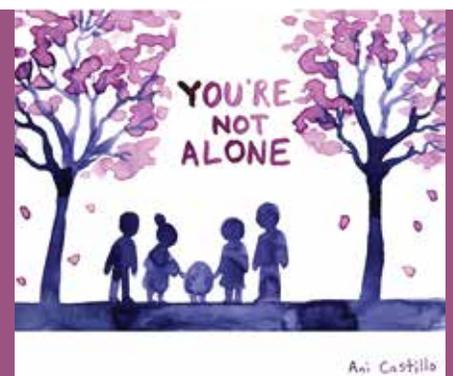


Find the good and praise it.

Children and teens who are struggling with emotional or behavioral problems find school extra hard and often deal with low self-esteem. They may be extra sensitive and much harder on themselves than their peers. Be genuine and generous in your praise and downplay their shortcomings. Assure them that with hard work and practice, they will eventually find difficult assignments easier.

Be familiar with options for accommodations.

For children and teenagers who still have trouble despite after school help or chances to correct their mistakes, IEPs and 504 Plans can help structure the unique assistance they need to succeed. Gently suggest these options to parents when appropriate – they may not even know this kind of extra help is available.



LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW YOU CAN HELP KIDS AND TEENS DEVELOP HEALTHY COPING SKILLS BY VISITING WWW.MENTALHEALTHAMERICA.NET/BACKTOSCHOOL.



Avoid embarrassment.

When dealing with a student who is being disruptive, take them aside or out in the hall to explain the problem rather than reprimanding them in front of their classmates. Ensure that they know the problem is with the behavior – not them – and how you expect them to behave moving forward.

Exercise compassion.

No special accommodation can substitute for patience, kindness, and flexibility. Teachers bring a great deal of compassion to the table to start with, but it can be easy to let it fall to the wayside when you've got a classroom full of 30 students, 4 more lesson plans to get through, and can't seem to get everyone to stay on the same page. No one expects you to be a saint – just try your best to keep your cool.



WE'RE ALL ON THE SAME TEAM



Work with parents.

Parents may see behaviors at home that you aren't seeing in school and vice versa. Keeping open lines of communication with parents will create consistency in working with students who have emotional or behavioral struggles and minimize misunderstandings. Make a plan that helps you communicate regularly with parents who need more frequent contact than others so that they're in the loop with what you're seeing in the classroom, and they can fill you in on what's going on at home.

Make time to take care of yourself.

Find ways to de-stress on evenings and weekends so you can bring your "A game" to the classroom. You might be the take-a-hot-bath type or you might be the cross fit type – whatever works best for you.



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Content adapted from Red Flags, "Ways to Assist Students with Depression or Related Disorders."

HELPING AT HOME: TIPS FOR PARENTS

The first rule of caring for your child's emotional or behavior struggles is that there are no rules. Parenthood doesn't come with a manual and there will be a lot of trial and error as you figure out what works best to help your child. Here are some strategies recommended from other parents that you can try.



Cover the basics.

Before you dismiss your child's outburst as a lack of control, ask yourself if there is a simple explanation for what's going on. Are they hungry or thirsty? Are they too hot or cold? Are they overstimulated? Did they get enough sleep? Are they feeling under the weather (i.e. – colds, allergies, headaches, upset stomachs)?



Pick your battles.

Ask yourself if this specific behavior is doing any harm, or if it's just annoying—annoying probably isn't worth arguing over. If you do get in an argument with your child, resist the urge to raise your voice. Be matter-of-fact and stand your ground.



Environment matters.

Do your best to create a home that is low on stress, safe, and supportive. A "Mary Poppins"-type household would be great, but let's get real. If you and your significant other get in a fight, keep it away from the kids. Give reasonable timelines for getting chores done. Praise your child for the things they do well and let them know that you love them.



Encourage communication.

Let your child know that they can talk to you about their thoughts, feelings, or difficult situations they're dealing with. When they do come to you, really listen to what they have to say. You may not agree or understand, but you need to accept that the difficulties they are having are very real to them. Think about things you struggled with when you were their age. Check out our mental health conversation starters at bit.ly/talk2teens.



Timing is everything.

In stressful situations, allow your child some space and address issues later when they have regained control over themselves, otherwise you're basically pouring gasoline on a fire.



Create calm.

A child in crisis and out of control cannot rely on reason. Your gut reaction may be to panic or go into mama or papa bear mode, but they rely on you to help them regain a sense of calm and stability. Soften your voice and use short, clear directions: "Come with me." "Sit down." "Take a deep breath." "Tell me what's going on."



Help them to help themselves.

Check out *Helpful vs Harmful--Ways to Manage Emotions* at bit.ly/copingtips, for a breakdown of constructive ways to deal with feelings. It's great for your child in the long-term and their teachers will also appreciate strong coping skills. Praise successes and use failures as learning opportunities. Ask questions like, "What can you do the next time you're in this situation?" or "What made you feel better the last time you felt this way?"



Tackle troubling thoughts.

Sometimes the brain can play tricks on us. We've all had something unsettling cross our minds or have assumed someone was mad at us when they weren't. Break down problem thoughts and bring your child back to reality. For instance, if they think that a friend doesn't like them anymore, ask them why they think that and if their friend did anything to make them think that way. Or if they are worried that you are going to get hurt in a car accident, remind them that you drive safely to and from work and/or school every day and that your car has airbags to help keep you safe. If there seems to be a bigger problem with anxiety or depression, take the Parent Screen at mhascreening.org to see if professional help may be needed.



Create routines.

Routines give a sense of stability to children and teens, especially those who struggle with anxiety. Keep both bedtime and the morning in mind. The Sleep Foundation recommends 9-11 hours of sleep for children ages 6-13, and 8-10 hours of sleep each night for teens ages 14-17. Make sure that your morning routine includes a healthy, low-sugar breakfast, which keeps young people from getting tired in school and helps improve attention span.



Check your tone.

You may find it tempting to blame problem behaviors on your child hanging out with the "wrong group of friends" - but if you use an accusatory tone, odds are your son or daughter will stop listening. Frame your approach from a place of care and concern, not anger.



Learn from other parents.

Each state sponsors a Family Run Organization to provide educational advocacy for youth with mental or behavioral health struggles. They have many tools, workshops and conferences to share with parents and caregivers on how to advocate for these young people. Find an organization in your state at bit.ly/famrunorg. MHA Affiliates also provide support, advocacy tools, and training for parents and caregivers—search for your local MHA at mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW YOU CAN HELP KIDS AND TEENS DEVELOP HEALTHY COPING SKILLS BY VISITING WWW.MENTALHEALTHAMERICA.NET/BACKTOSCHOOL.



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www.mentalhealthamerica.net

Content adapted from
Red Flags
"Coping with Depression at Home."

HELPFUL VS HARMFUL: WAYS TO MANAGE EMOTIONS

Negative emotions like fear, sadness, and anger are a basic part of life and sometimes we struggle with how to deal with them effectively. It can be tempting to act on what you're feeling right away, but that often doesn't fix the situation that caused the emotions. In fact, it may lead to more problems to deal with down the road.

Some of the harmful ways that people deal with negative emotions:



Denial

Denial is when a person refuses to accept that anything is wrong or that help may be needed. When people deny that they are having problematic feelings, those feelings can bottle-up to a point that a person ends up "exploding" or acting out in a harmful way.



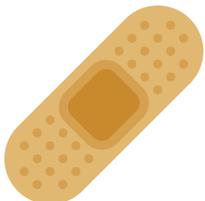
Withdrawal

Withdrawal is when a person doesn't want to be around, or participate in activities with other people. This is different than wanting to be alone from time to time, and can be a warning sign of depression. Some people may withdraw because being around others takes too much energy, or they feel overwhelmed. Others may withdraw because they don't think other people like them or want them to be around. In some cases, people who have behaviors that they are ashamed of may withdraw so other people don't find out about what they are doing. But withdrawal brings its own problems: extreme loneliness, misunderstanding, anger, and distorted thinking. We need to interact with other people to keep us balanced.



Bullying

Bullying is when a person uses force, threats, or ridicule to show power over others. People typically take part in bullying behavior because they don't feel good about themselves and making someone else feel bad makes them feel better about themselves or feel less alone. It is harmful to both the bully and the person being bullied and does not address underlying issues.



Self-harm

Self-harm can take many forms including: cutting, starving one's self, bingeing and purging, or participating in dangerous behavior. Many people self-harm because they feel like it gives them control over emotional pain. While self-harming may bring temporary relief, these behaviors can become addictive and can lead people to be more out of control and in greater pain than ever.



Substance use

Substance use is the use of alcohol and other drugs to make a person feel better or numb about painful situations. Alcohol and drug use can damage the brain, making it need higher amounts of substances to get the same effect. This can make difficult feelings even worse and in some cases, leads to suicidal thoughts or addiction. If you are concerned about your own or someone else's use of drugs or alcohol, talk to a responsible adult right away to get help.

The good news is that with practice, everyone can do a better job of dealing with their negative emotions in healthy ways. One way to deal with uncomfortable or unpleasant emotions is to remember the word PATH. PATH stands for:

Pause

Acknowledge

Think

Help

Step 1: Pause.

This step is important because instead of acting on feelings right away, you stop yourself and think things through. Count to 100 or say the alphabet backwards.

Step 2: Acknowledge what you're feeling.

For example, are you mad at someone, or are you sad because your feelings were hurt by what they did? Whatever it is that you are feeling, it is ok to feel that way.

Step 3: Think.

Now that you have taken a few moments to figure out what exactly it is that you are feeling, think about how you can make yourself feel better.

Step 4: Help.

Take an action to help yourself based upon what you came up with in the "Think" step.

If you are having trouble thinking of ways to help yourself, try one (or a few) from this list:

Process Feelings

-  Draw how you're feeling.
-  Make a gratitude list.
-  Punch a pillow.
-  Scream.
-  Let yourself cry.
-  Rip paper into small pieces.
-  Vent. Venting is not the same as asking for help, it's taking an opportunity to share your feelings out loud. We do this naturally when we talk with someone we can trust about whatever is upsetting us. You can also vent by writing a letter to the person who upset you. Keep the letter a couple of days and then tear it up. Stick to pen and paper—using social media when you are highly emotional can be tempting, but you might say something you regret.

Acts of Kindness

-  Do something nice for someone you know.
-  Help a stranger.
-  Volunteer your time.

Relaxation Exercises

-  Practice belly breathing – put one hand on your stomach and start to inhale slowly. As you breathe in, imagine a balloon in your stomach filling up and continue to inhale until the balloon is very full. Put your other hand on your heart, feel your heartbeat, and hold your breath for 5 seconds. Now let your breath out slowly for 10 seconds – feel your belly flatten like a deflating balloon. Repeat this process 4 or 5 times and you should notice your heart beat slow down and your muscles relax.
-  Try progressive muscle relaxation – clench your toes for a count of 5, then relax them for a count of 5, then move to your calves, then your thighs, then your abs, then your arms, then your neck.
-  Play with Play Doh.
-  Go for a walk – feel the ground under your feet and the air on your skin. Focus on your senses.
-  Find a guided meditation on YouTube.
-  Do yoga – you can find videos on demand using your tv or online.
-  Read a book.
-  Listen to music, a podcast, or an audiobook.
-  Unplug – turn off your phone, tablet, and/or computer for an hour or so.

Problem Solving

☑ Make a list of solutions to problems – it can help to brainstorm with a friend or family member.

👤 Make a list of your strengths. Remember there are plenty of things about you that are awesome, no matter how down you are feeling at the moment.

💬 If a person has upset you, talk with them directly. Fill in the blanks to this sentence – “I feel _____ when _____ happens because _____.” Next time, could you please _____.”

Example: “I feel left out when there is no room at the lunch table, because then I don’t have friends to talk to. Next time can you please save me a seat?”

Mood Boosters

📖 Read the story of someone you admire.

📺 Watch a funny YouTube video.

🐾 Play with an animal.

🎬 Watch a movie you loved when you were younger.

🏠 Reorganize your room.

✈️ Make a list of places you want to travel.

Ask for Help

💬 Text a friend.

👉 Ask someone to just sit with you.

📞 Call a family member.

👤 Talk to an adult you trust.

☎️ Call a friend you haven’t talked to recently.

! If you are in crisis, call 1-800-273-TALK or text “MHA” to 741741.

Address Your Basic Needs

🍏 Eat a healthy snack.

🥛 Drink a glass of water.

🚿 Take a shower or bath.

🛏️ Take a nap.

Hobbies & Stress Relievers

📺 Learn something new – there are tutorials for all kinds of hobbies online.

🎨 Create - try a craft project, color, paint, or draw. Invite a friend to join you for added fun.

📖 Write – you could write a story, a poem, or an entry in a journal.

🏃 Get active – dancing, running, or playing a sport are some good ways to get moving.

🎮 Play a video game.

🌱 Get a plant and start a garden.

If nothing seems to work...

If you still feel sad, worried, or scared after trying to help yourself, you might be showing the early warning signs of anxiety or depression.

A screening is an anonymous, free, and private way to learn about your mental health and if you are showing warning signs of a mental illness. Visit mhascreeing.org to take a screen—it only takes a few minutes, and after you are finished you will be given information about the next steps you should take based on the results.

A screening is not a diagnosis, but it can be a helpful tool for starting a conversation with your doctor or a loved one about your mental health.

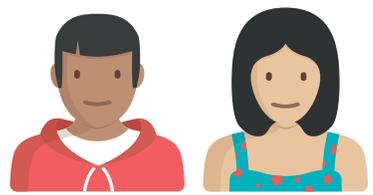
YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH: EMOTIONS MATTER

EMOTIONS ARE A BASIC PART OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE—WE'VE ALL GOT THEM—AND MANY OF US STRUGGLE WITH HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM EFFECTIVELY.



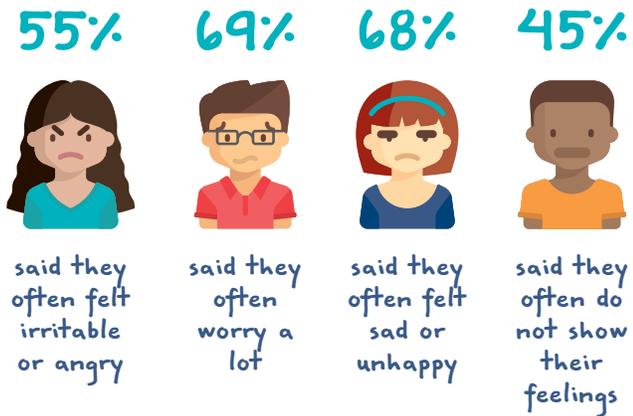
The English language has over 400 words for emotions!

Studies show that men and women experience the same amount of emotion,



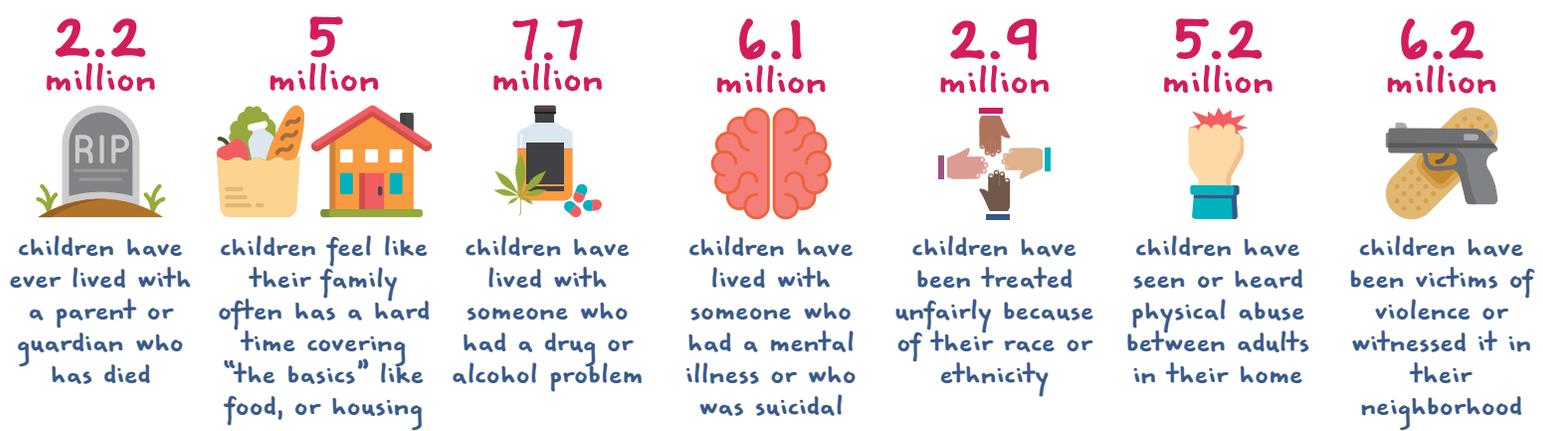
but women tend to show it more²

Of 11-17 year olds who took MHA's Youth Screen:³



KIDS AND TEENS ARE DEALING WITH REAL PROBLEMS AND THE COMPLICATED EMOTIONS THAT COME WITH THEM.

According to the National Survey of Children's Health:⁴



And it doesn't stop there...



of children (ages 2-17) have been emotionally bullied or teased in the past year⁵



children (ages 8-18) are estimated to be caregivers⁶



of LGBTQ youth (age 11-17) who take a screen at mhascreening.org score "at-risk" for a mental health disorder⁷

WITHOUT HEALTHY COPING SKILLS, THE EMOTIONS THAT COME ALONG WITH THE ISSUES KIDS ARE FACING CAN RESULT IN BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS.

 **4.6%** of children (ages 3-17) have been diagnosed with either Oppositional Defiance Disorder or Conduct Disorder &  Boys are **2x** more likely than girls to have these disorders⁸

11% of those who took MHA's Youth Screen reported having conduct problems often

 By the time parents came to take the Parent Screen, **23%** reported seeing conduct problems often in their children⁹

MISBEHAVIOR IN SCHOOLS IS OFTEN ADDRESSED WITH DISCIPLINARY MEASURES LIKE SUSPENSION, EXPULSION, OR EVEN ARREST.

7 million students  received in-school or out-of-school suspensions in the 2011-2012 school year¹⁰

3 and 4 year olds are expelled from childcare centers at  **13x** the rate of K-12 aged youth¹¹

92 thousand students  were involved in school-related arrests during one year¹²

BUT DISCIPLINE LIKE THIS OFTEN LEAVES KIDS AND TEENS FEELING ISOLATED AND LABELLED, FURTHER FUELING THE FEELINGS THAT CAUSE THE MISBEHAVIOR IN THE FIRST PLACE AND LEADING TO POOR OUTCOMES DOWN THE ROAD.

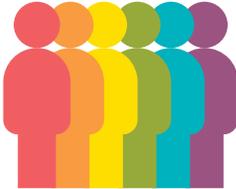
 **48%** of 11-17 year olds who took MHA's Youth Screen said they often felt that they were "bad"¹³

Young students who are expelled or suspended are as much as **10x** more likely    to drop out of high school, experience academic failure, be held back, hold negative school attitudes, and face incarceration than those who are not¹⁴

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY. BY PROVIDING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND TEACHING KIDS AND TEENS TO RECOGNIZE THEIR EMOTIONS AND ADDRESS THEM IN HEALTHY WAYS, WE CAN CHANGE LIVES.

 School-age children whose mothers nurtured them in early childhood have larger hippocampi, a key structure in the brain important to learning, memory, and responding to stress¹⁵

 Students who have strong social emotional skills have better physical and mental health, more employment opportunities, fewer relationship problems, and are less likely to abuse substances as adults¹⁶

 When schools have gay-straight alliances and policies against LGBTQ harassment, gay students have fewer suicidal thoughts and attempts¹⁷

 Restorative discipline practices show great promise, with some K-8 schools showing as high as a 67% reduction in suspensions over a multi-year period¹⁸

LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW YOU CAN HELP KIDS AND TEENS DEVELOP HEALTHY COPING SKILLS BY VISITING WWW.MENTALHEALTHAMERICA.NET/BACKTOSCHOOL.

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THE PATH TO CALM



Pause

Step 1: Pause.

Instead of acting on feelings right away, stop yourself and think things through. Count to 100 or say the alphabet backwards.



Acknowledge

Step 2: Acknowledge what you're feeling.

For example, are you mad at someone, or are you sad because your feelings were hurt by what they did? Whatever it is that you are feeling, it is ok to feel that way.



Think

Step 3: Think.

Now that you have taken a few moments to figure out what exactly it is that you are feeling, think about how you can make yourself feel better.



Help

Step 4: Help.

Take an action to help yourself based upon what you came up with in the "Think" step.

EMOTIONS MATTER: LESSONS ON BUILDING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Instructions for Group Activity (teachers, support people, etc.)

The *Learning Feelings* (Part 1) activity can be a stand-alone lesson. You should not move on to *Assigning Feelings to Situations* (Part 2) or *Identifying Solutions* (Part 3) without first going through the previous activities.

If you will focus on a specific feeling for the *Assigning Feelings to Situations* activity (Part 2), we suggest starting with the feeling of being content. Feeling content, satisfied, or safe means that our needs are met, as compared to happy – which is how we feel when an extraordinary event that brings joy happens. Once children recognize feeling content, they can identify negative feelings and how to get back to feeling content.

Materials:

Scissors, tape or glue sticks, crayons/colored pencils/markers, printed copies of *I Feel When...* worksheet and *Feelings List, PATH to Calm* poster

Part 1: Learning Feelings

It is really hard to identify our true feelings. Generally, when you ask someone how they feel, they will use vague terms like, “sad,” “mad,” or “happy.” But underneath these feelings – there are many other feelings words that might better describe how you feel. The goal of this activity is to build an emotional vocabulary.

1. Start the discussion by explaining that everyone has feelings. Ask the children to define what feelings/emotions are.
2. Distribute the *Feelings List*. Have the children cut out the words from the list.
3. Pick 5-10 feelings from the list (or use the large words at the top of the *Feelings List*) and have the children define each feeling or describe what each feeling is like.
4. If you have time, an alternate activity is to put the children into small groups and have them categorize each feeling from the list into buckets/categories of feelings that might go together. For instance, you may ask them to sort words from the list into “good” and “bad” feelings. There are no right or wrong answers.

Part 2: Assigning Feelings to Situations

The goal of this activity is to teach children to slow down and assess their situation and feelings instead of having an automatic reaction. By being more in tune to their feelings, children are able to come up with solutions and reduce their distress levels.

1. Choose a major feeling and its associated worksheet (Content, Sad, Angry, Scared/Worried). NOTE: You may use the sheet with the blank space if you would like to discuss a different emotion.
2. Open the discussion of this feeling by reviewing what this word means (Content, Sad, Angry, Scared/Worried, or your chosen emotion).
3. Talk about how there are more feelings than just happy, sad, angry, or scared/worried. Underneath the big feeling – there are many other feelings that come from different places, like past experiences or our thoughts. Learning to identify different feelings helps us to understand where feelings come from and helps us to find solutions that will make us feel better.
4. Next, share a scenario with the class that relates to the major feeling you have chosen to focus upon. DO NOT use a scenario that identifies or singles out any specific child or children. If it is an emotionally secure environment among the children, open up the discussion to talk about different scenarios the group might share – like having nightmares, fighting with friends or siblings, seeing others get into fights, etc.

5. Distribute the relevant the *I Feel (Content, Sad, Angry, Scared/Worried, _____) When...* worksheet. Prompt the children to draw a picture of the scenario that makes them feel content, sad, angry, scared/worried, or your chosen emotion.*

6. Have children assign feelings that they cut out from the *Feelings List* (Part 1) to the picture they drew by either cutting and pasting/taping, or writing them into the spaces in the "My Feelings" column. 7. If you have chosen content as your feeling of focus, you are now done with the lesson.

Modification for One-on-One Activity: If you have the opportunity to do this activity with one child and you know that child is going through a particularly tough situation, a modification is to have the child draw out a picture of that particularly tough situation rather than a generic situation. The intimacy of a one-on-one situation allows for more privacy and individualized support.

*In the event that a child draws a picture that indicates they are being abused or living in an unsafe environment, please take appropriate action with school administrators and public service agencies as indicated in your school's policies and procedures.

Part 3: Identifying Solutions

Sometimes when we have overwhelming feelings, we forget that we can gain power over them by doing something to feel better. The goal of this activity is to increase student insight into their ability to help themselves. Identifying and following up with solutions takes practice.

1. Ask children to reflect on their picture (Part 2) and the feelings they assigned to it.

2. Introduce the concept of being able to take action to manage feelings. Talk about how solutions can come from other people – like maybe a friend or parent who steps in to help. Other solutions come from changing our thoughts or actions. Use the *PATH to Calm* poster to review the steps children can take when their feelings are "taking over."

3. Ask students to think about what would have made them feel better in the scenario that they drew in Part 2. Get them to brainstorm specific things they can do to help themselves, like ask for a hug, go to a safe quiet space, read a book, or walk away. Write these ideas for the entire class to see. If they are having trouble coming up with ideas, use the list provided on the *Helpful vs Harmful: Ways to Manage Emotions* handout included in the Back to School toolkit to give them suggestions.

4. Have students write down a list of those things they could have done to feel better in the "Things I Can Do to Feel Better" column of the worksheet that they drew on.

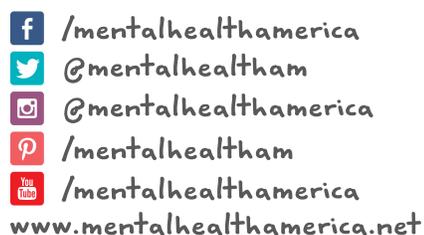
5. Ask students if they would like to share what they came up with (if the time and place make sense).

Part 4: Practice!

The more children practice the above activities the better they are able to become emotionally intelligent and resilient adults. Happy practicing.

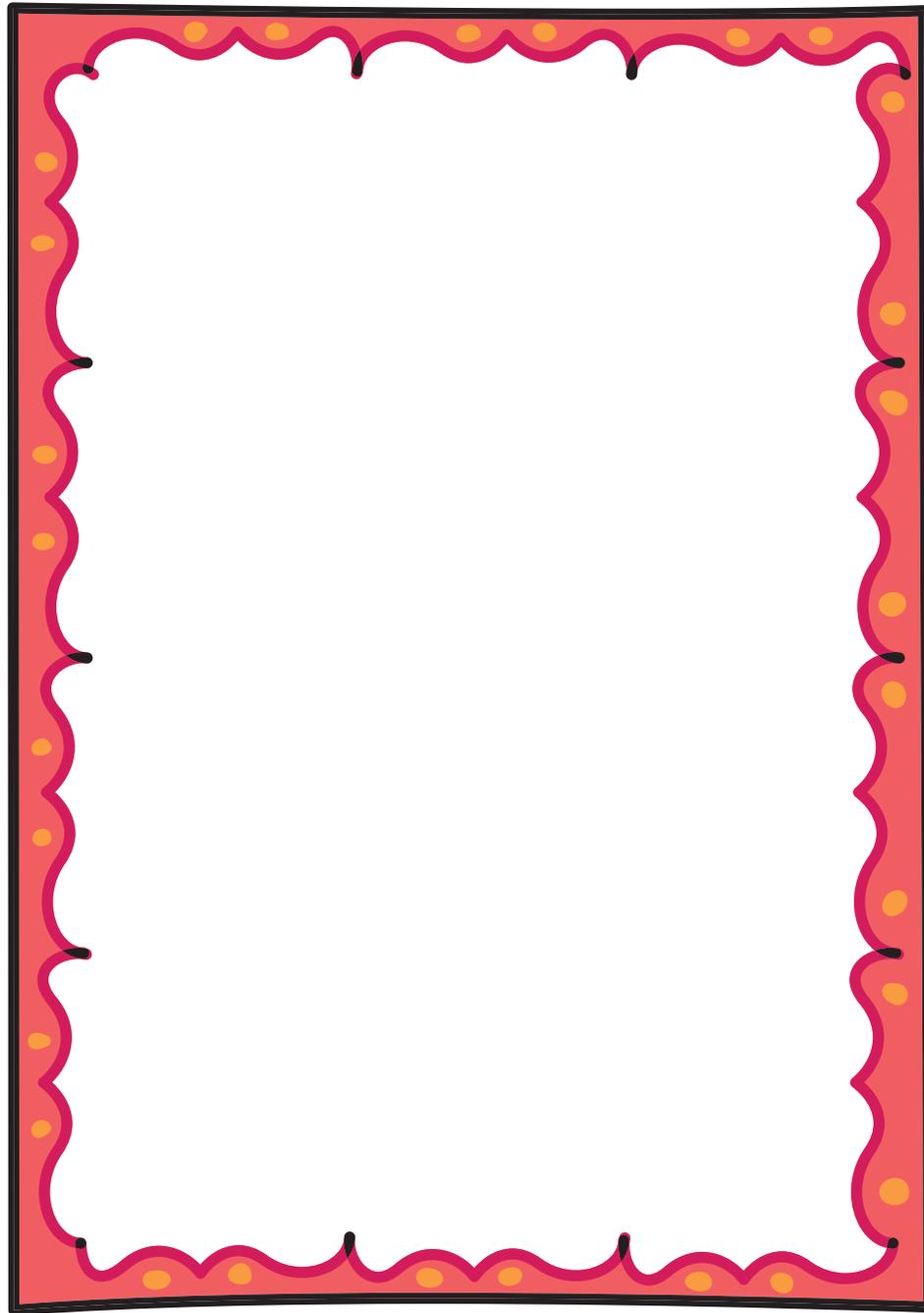
1. Repeat the above activity with other feelings (Content, Sad, Angry, Scared/Worried, or an emotion of your choice) to build practice.

2. When situations that come up during school that are upsetting, ask children to pause and think about the things they're feeling. Then practice identifying solutions. This may be particularly helpful after tragic or traumatic events that dominate the media.



I FEEL ANGRY WHEN...

My feelings:



Things I can do to feel better:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

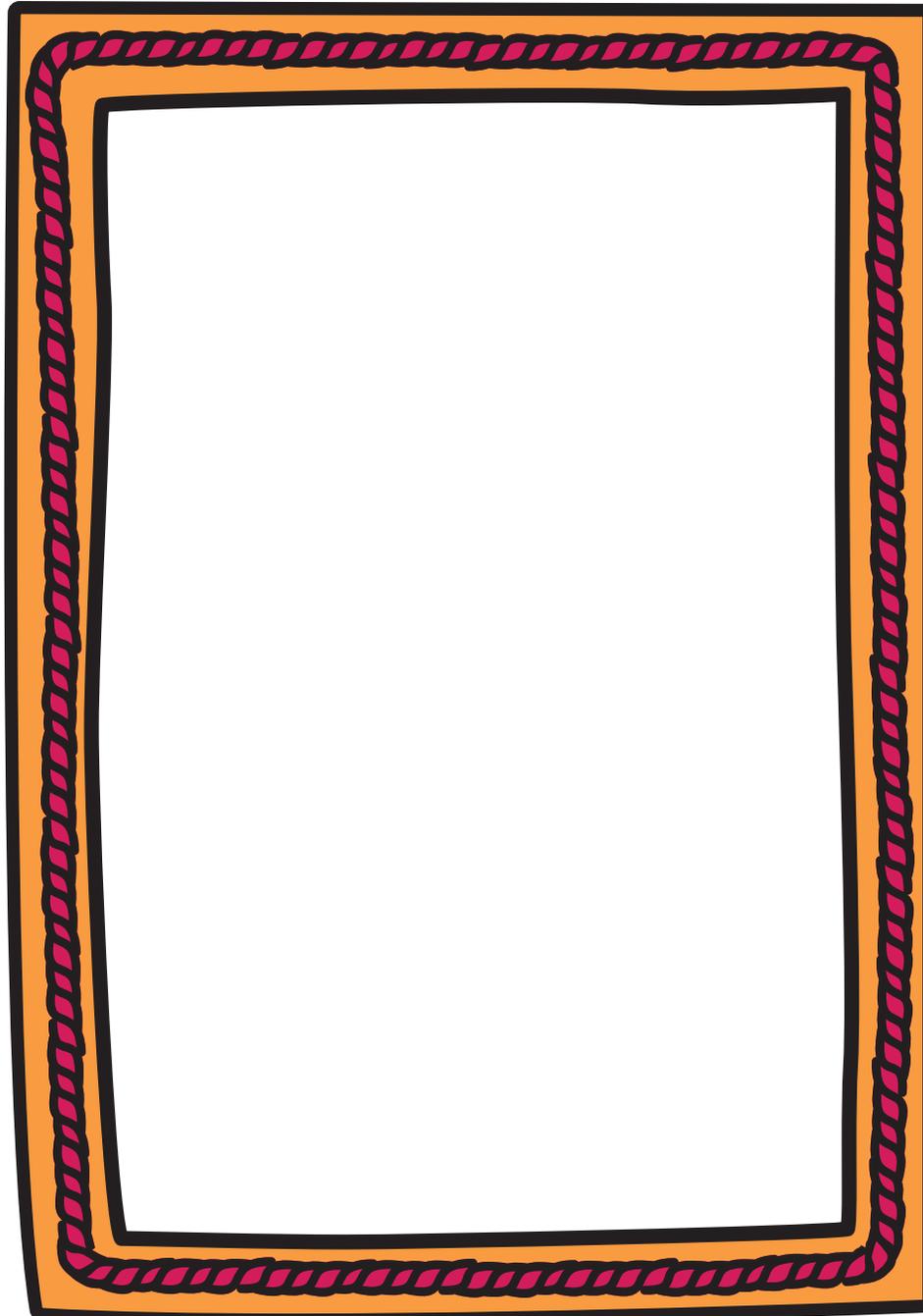
8.

9.

10.

My feelings:

I FEEL SCARED OR WORRIED WHEN...



Things I can do to feel better:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

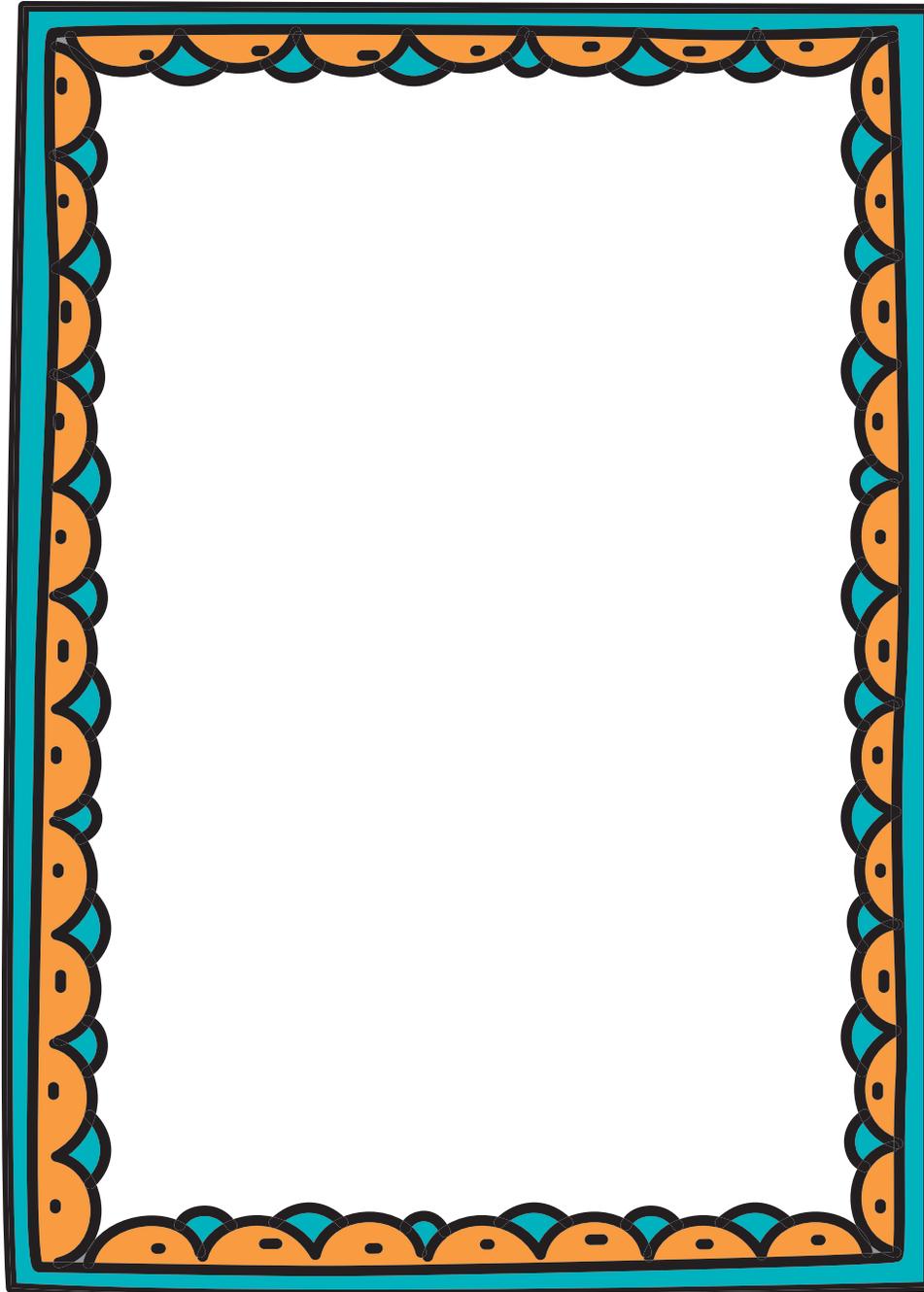
8.

9.

10.

My feelings:

I FEEL CONTENT WHEN...



Things I can do to feel better:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

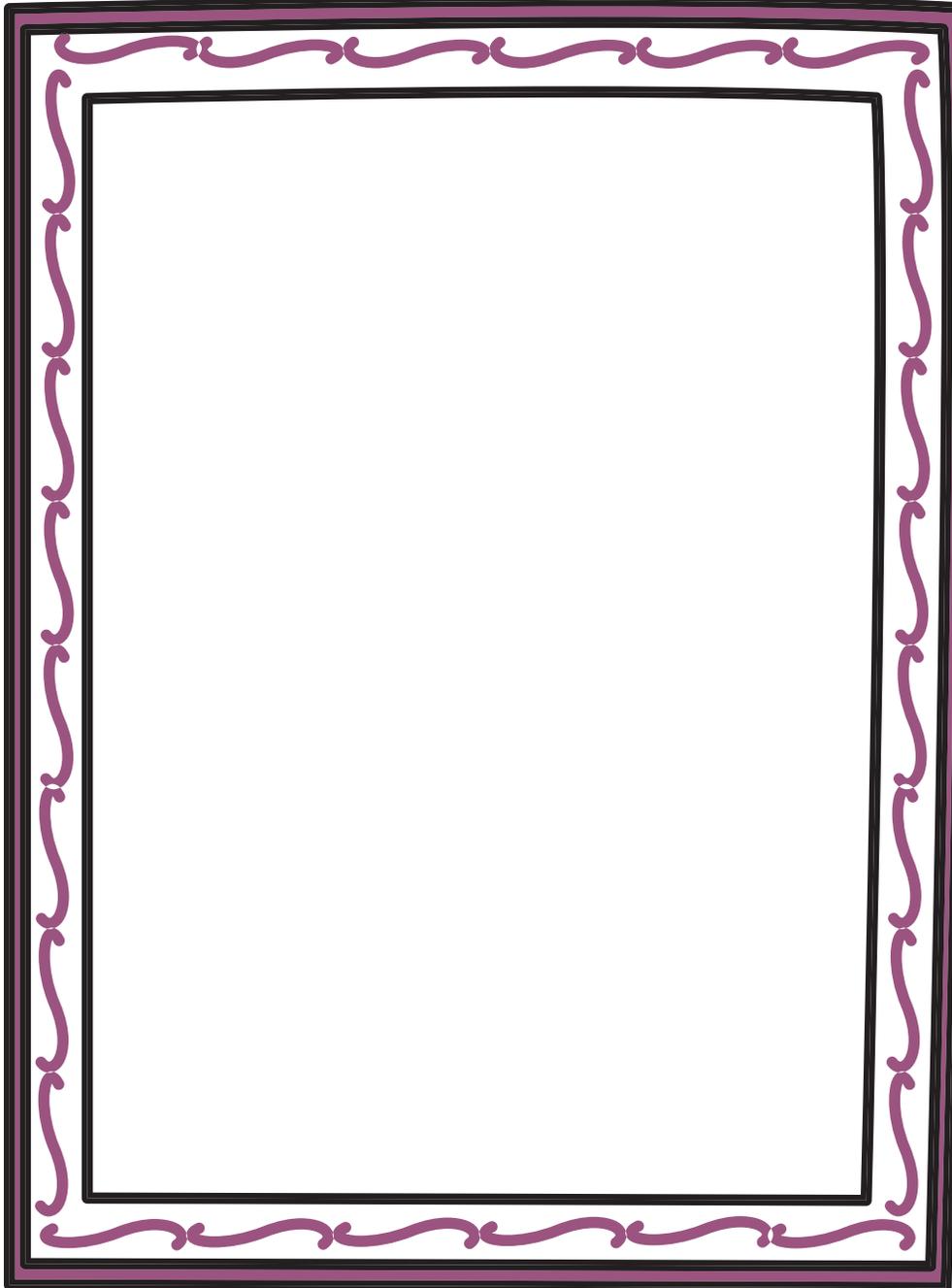
7.

8.

9.

10.

My feelings: I FEEL _____ WHEN... Things I can do to feel better:



1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

FEELINGS LIST

	SAD	WORRIED	ANGRY	HAPPY	CONTENT
	Gloomy	Afraid	Dislike	Joyful	Safe
	Empty	Uncomfortable	Crabby	Excited	Calm
	Hurt	Concerned	Bothered	Surprised	Hopeful
	Sorry	Nervous	Jealous	Loved	Thankful
	Lonely	Scared	Embarrassed	Amazed	Strong
	Disappointed	Threatened	Furious	Playful	Relaxed
	Insecure	Dreading	Worked-Up	Silly	Confident
	Let Down	Self-Conscious	Shocked	Terrific	Included
	Unloved	Edgy	Pain	Glad	Trusting
	Helpless	Stressed	Like I Could Explode	Pleased	Comfortable
CONFUSED	Out-Of-Place	Misunderstood	Lost	Stuck	Excluded
	Awkward	Hungry	Frustrated	Irritated	Exhausted
	OTHER	Indecisive	Proud	Sassy	Shy
			Weird	Bored	Curious
			Thrilled	Sleepy	Alert