

# MODULE 6

## PREPARATION

### The Importance of Positive Mental Health

#### Overview

What constitutes a mentally healthy person? Does everyone have mental health? In this module, students will explore these questions and will look at the impact of mental health on overall well-being. Through several group activities, students will also learn about the impact of stress, and will identify appropriate and effective coping strategies to deal with stress.

#### Learning Objectives

- To describe the characteristics of an emotionally healthy person
- To learn about and demonstrate skills that enhance personal mental health, including stress management techniques

#### Major Concepts Addressed

- Everyone has mental health that can be supported and promoted - regardless of whether or not they also have a mental illness
- Positive coping strategies can help everyone maintain and enhance their mental health

#### Teacher Preparation

Read through all activities before class.

#### Activities

- Activity 1: Taking Care of Your Mental Health (5 mins.)
- Activity 2: What Do We Mean By “Stress?” (15 mins.)
- Activity 3: How Do You Cope? (15 mins.)
- Activity 4: Taking Charge of My Health (15 mins.)
- Activity 5: How Do I Teen My Parent? and How Do I Parent My Teen? (15 mins.)

#### In Advance

- Photocopy handouts for Activity 1: Taking Care of Your Mental Health (one copy for each student) and Activity 3: Coping Cards (only one copy)
- Cut out Coping Cards
- Copy Activity 4 “Taking Charge of my Health” – one copy per student

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### Materials Required

- Handouts: Activity 1: Taking Care of Your Mental Health and Activity 3: Coping Cards
- Flip chart, paper and pens

### Online Supplementary Materials

The supplementary materials are designed to enable you to challenge students in your class to learn more about different mental disorders. These may or may not be resources you wish to employ. Please review them and decide if and how you wish to use them.

If you are also using Teacher Knowledge Update, print as many copies as you think will be necessary for your class.

### Useful Links

Dr. Dan Siegel: The Healthy Mind Platter  
[http://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/healthy\\_mind\\_platter/](http://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/healthy_mind_platter/)

JCSH  
<http://jcsH-cces.ca>

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[www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org) and [www.keltymentalhealth.ca](http://www.keltymentalhealth.ca) are trusted resources for youth mental health. Other potential useful websites are listed in the resources section of this guide.

## Activity 1: (5 mins.)

### Taking Care of Your Mental Health

#### Purpose:

- To explore students' growing understanding of mental health, and its importance to themselves.
- To brainstorm about the kinds of things that contribute to positive mental health.

#### How-to:

- 1) Ask students to brainstorm ideas of the kinds of things that keep people mentally healthy. Potential ideas are listed below:
  - think positive
  - organize your time
  - value yourself
  - eat right and exercise
  - try new things
  - get enough sleep
  - make plans
  - set realistic goals and work towards them
  - reward yourself
  - share concerns and worries with friends and family
- 2) Hand out photocopies of 'Taking care of your mental health' for students to keep.

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## Activity 1 HANDOUT

### The Importance of Good Mental Health:

Achieving mental health is about striking a balance in the social, physical, spiritual, economic and mental aspects of our lives. Reaching a balance is a learning process and it is ongoing. At times, we may tip the balance too much in one direction and have to find our footing again. Our personal balance is highly individual, and our challenge is to stay mentally healthy by finding and keeping that balance.

To find out more about building healthy self-esteem, creating positive relationships, coping with change, and learning to manage stress, read the 10 tips below taken from the CMHA fact sheet Mental Health For Life at [www.ontario.cmha.ca/fact\\_sheets.asp?cID=3219](http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/fact_sheets.asp?cID=3219).

From nurturing relationships with family and

friends, to identifying and dealing with situations that upset you – including stressful circumstances such as the pressure of exams, a conflict at work, or a misunderstanding with a friend – you can take steps to improve and maintain your mental health throughout your life.

### The Canadian Mental Health Association has 10 tips for mental health:

1. Build a healthy self-esteem
2. Receive as well as give
3. Create positive parenting and family relationships
4. Make friends who count
5. Figure out your priorities
6. Get involved
7. Learn to manage stress effectively
8. Cope with changes that affect you
9. Deal with your emotions
10. Have a spirituality to call your own

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## Activity 1 HANDOUT

### Taking Care of Your Mental Health

Consider these key characteristics when assessing your own mental health:

You can gauge your mental health by thinking about how you coped with a recent difficulty. Did you feel there was no way out of the problem and that life would never be normal again? Were you unable to carry on with work or school? With time, were you able to enjoy your life, family and friendships? Were you able to regain your balance and look forward to the future?

Taking the pulse of mental health brings different results for everyone; it's unique to each individual. By reflecting on these characteristics, you can recognize your strengths and identify areas where your level of mental fitness could be improved.

**Ability to enjoy life** – Can you live in the moment and appreciate the “now”? Are you able to learn from the past and plan for the future without dwelling on things you can't change or predict?

**Resilience** – Are you able to bounce back from hard times? Can you manage the stress of a serious life event without losing your optimism and sense of perspective?

**Balance** – Are you able to juggle the many aspects of your life? Can you recognize when you might be devoting too much time to one aspect, at the expense of others? Are you able to make changes to restore balance when necessary?

**Self-actualization** – Do you recognize and develop your strengths so that you can reach your full potential?

**Flexibility** – Do you feel (and express) a range of emotions? When problems arise, can you change your expectations – of life, others, yourself – to solve the problem and feel better?

Stress is often good for you. Stress has a powerful adaptive function. It helps us solve problems, create new ideas and learn new skills. Too little stress stifles creativity. Too much stress can immobilize us. We need the right amount of stress for success.

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## Activity 2: (15 mins.)

### What Do We Mean By “Stress?”

#### Purpose:

- To identify different kinds of stress and the impact that stress can have on overall well-being.
- To give examples of stressors commonly experienced by young people, and explore different coping strategies and positive ways of dealing with stress.

#### How-to:

- 1) Ask students to imagine that they are about to explain to an alien what human beings mean by stress. Ask them to form pairs and talk with their partner and develop a definition (e.g. “stress is when...”) and write their ideas down in point form.
- 2) Ask each pair to share their definitions, and write them on the board as they read them aloud.
- 3) Ask students what they notice about what stress means to different people.
- 4) Ask students to brainstorm about the different kinds of stressors. Use the list below as a guide to make sure all areas are mentioned. Write their responses on the board.

#### Different kinds of stressors:

- Physical stressors (e.g. injury, illness, fatigue, hunger, lack of shelter)
- Social stressors (e.g. arguments, rejection, embarrassment)
- Intellectual stressors (e.g. mental fatigue, lack of understanding)
- Emotional stressors (e.g. death of a close friend or family member)
- Spiritual Stressors (e.g. guilt, moral conflicts, lack of sense of purpose)

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Introduce the idea that stress can be seen either as a challenge or an opportunity, or as a nightmare or trap. Tell students that people who can imagine or visualize themselves handling their challenges or stresses in a positive way, with an image of themselves having some power or control, are able to bounce back more easily after difficult times. Provide the example of professional athletes, who often use mental pictures to visualize themselves conquering a challenge. Explain to students that this technique can also work for the rest of us – that we can all work at inventing or imagining pictures of ourselves succeeding, and this can help us to do our best in a situation where we fear failure, embarrassment or hard work. Explain that research has shown that people who can learn to visualize themselves succeeding are more likely to actually succeed.

## Activity 2: (15 mins.)

### What Do We Mean By “Stress?” (cont.)

#### How-to (cont.):

- 5) Divide students into groups of four or five. Ask each group to brainstorm around the following question: “What are some of the stresses and challenges people around your age face?”

Circulate around the room as the students are brainstorming in their groups, and use the probes below if they need help or direction:

- What sorts of stresses in the physical environment can directly affect how you feel either physically or emotionally?
  - What sorts of stresses or challenges can happen to relationships or between people?
  - What kinds of happenings or events can cause stress (e.g. family breakup, transitions like leaving school or moving, illness, end of a close relationship, etc.)
  - What are some of the fears, anxieties or thoughts that can get people feeling stressed?
- 6) As the groups report back, ask several students to record the brainstorm results on flip chart paper. Explain that this list will be used later in the next activity.

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## Activity 3: (15 mins.)

### How Do You Cope?

#### Purpose:

- To describe a range of coping strategies to deal with stressful and challenging situations.
- To identify some of students' own preferred coping strategies, and examine the effectiveness of different strategies.

#### How-to:

- 1) Remind students that in the previous activity they identified the kinds of things people can feel stressed out about, and some of the thoughts and feelings they can have when faced with challenging and stressful situations.
- 2) Ask students to get into pairs or groups of three, and ask them to share examples of things they like to do when they feel stressed or overworked. Ask a student in each group to write down at least one of the coping strategies discussed. To prepare for the next part of the activity, while students are busy in their groups, stick up one piece of paper in each corner of the room, with the words "Helpful", "Not much use", "Useless" and "Harmful" written on them.
- 3) Explain to the class that in this activity you'll be examining coping strategies, or things that people do in response to stress or challenge. Point out that there is a huge range of possible coping strategies, that it's different for each individual, varies in terms of a person's culture, religious background, gender, etc. and that there is no one right way of coping. Explain that people who cope effectively often have a whole range of different strategies that they use, and that people often learn about coping by watching what their friends and family do.
- 4) Have students come back together and arrange themselves in a circle. Ask those who recorded their group's coping strategies to put the paper on the floor in the middle of the circle, and spread Coping Cards into the pile, face down. Ask each student to choose two cards or strategies offered by the students.
- 5) Ask students to choose one of the cards and hold it up at chest height so that it can be read by others.



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## Activity 3: (15 mins.)

### How Do You Cope? (cont.)

#### How-to (cont.):

- 6) Explain to the class that you will describe a situation of potential stress or challenge. Students will then be asked to move to a defined area of the room according to whether they think their coping strategy would be helpful, not much use, useless or harmful.
- 7) Describe the scenario, choosing either from the brainstormed list that the students came up with, or from the suggestions below:
  - faced with a big exam
  - dealing with separation of parents
  - dealing with death of someone close
- 8) When the students have grouped, have them compare and comment on their choices. Ask them to put their other coping card on top and regroup if they think this card belongs to a different category.
- 9) Play a few rounds of the game to emphasize the point that different situations may call for different coping strategies. Remind students that there are no right or wrong answers, and that sometimes the most important coping strategy can involve getting help or support for yourself or someone else.

### Box Breathing

One useful technique to learn to help with dealing with stress is Box Breathing. It takes about 15 minutes to learn and once mastered can be applied unobtrusively and quietly – ideal for a classroom situation. This technique is described below. Just before beginning the How Do You Cope exercise would be a good time to teach the students Box Breathing.

Box Breathing can help your heart rate return to normal, which helps you to relax. Here's how you do it: If possible, sit and close your eyes. If not, just focus on your breathing.

- Step 1:** Inhale your breath (preferably through your nose) for 4 seconds.  
**Step 2:** Hold your breath for 4 seconds. You're not trying to deprive yourself of air; you're just giving the air a few seconds to fill your lungs.  
**Step 3:** Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.  
**Step 4:** Pause for 4 seconds (without speaking) before breathing again.

Repeat this process as many times as you can. Even 30 seconds of deep breathing will help you feel more relaxed and in control.

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## Activity 3 HANDOUT

### Coping Cards

Withdraw – not mix with other people	Think positive about how it will turn out
Play computer games	Worry
Visit a favourite person	See a counselor
Eat more	Eat junk food
Quit (the job, the team...)	Sleep more
Avoid or put off something you have to do	Go for a run
Prioritize (put the most important things first)	Party/socialize
Fantasize - daydream an escape	Run away
Plan – figure out how to do it	Get sick
Start a fight	Blame someone else

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## Activity 3 HANDOUT

### Coping Cards

Blame yourself	Smoke cigarettes
Ask for help	Go out
Talk it over	Complain
Eat less	Change direction
Have a shower	Go to bed early
Drink alcohol	Exercise
Work harder	Stay out late
Meditate	Listen to music
Pretend it's okay	Call friends
Watch television	Write about it

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## Activity 3 HANDOUT

### Coping Cards

Cook something	Sleep less
Walk the dog	Go shopping
Pray	Draw or paint
Take a day off	Tidy up
Take risks	Make something
Problem-solve	Find new friends
Cry	Joke or laugh
Set goals	Go for a swim
Play sports	

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## Activity 4: (15 mins.)

### Taking Charge of My Health

#### Purpose:

- To reinforce that mental health and physical health are obtained and maintained with numerous similar strategies.
- To provide a diary experience of daily activities needed to obtain and maintain good mental health.

#### How-to:

- 1) Introduce the students to the resource Taking Charge of My Health (provide each student with a copy of the resource with enough pages for a week of diary keeping).
- 2) Instruct each student to every day choose one item from each of the diary sections as their “next day challenge” and to try and complete each of those challenges the next day.
- 3) Ask the students to do this daily for a week. Also, do it yourself to model how.
- 4) Review the exercise in a week from now. Lead a classroom discussion: how many challenges did each student manage to keep daily (on average), how did they find the exercise (tiring, difficult, enjoyable, etc.), and what did they learn from doing this exercise?

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## Activity 5: (15 mins.)

### How Do I Teen My Parent? and How Do I Parent My Teen?

#### Purpose:

- To provide a vehicle for teens to be able to better understand their parents and their relationship with their parents.
- To encourage the students to discuss issues pertaining to being a teenager and mental health with their parents.

#### How-to:

- 1) Download or direct the students to the resource “How do I Teen My Parent” – <http://teenmentalhealth.org/toolbox/teen-parentparent-teen/>.
- 2) Assign reading the resource for homework – with answers to the following questions to be written down and returned to class.
- 3) Suggest that they provide their parents with the link to the companion resource “How Do I Parent My Teen”.

#### Homework Questions:

- 1) What was the most important thing that you learned about being a teenager that you did not already know?
- 2) What communication tips will you use next time that you have something important to talk to your parent about?
- 3) Did your parent read the “How do I Parent My Teen” booklet? If so, what did they think of it?