

**Multnomah Education Service District
School Health Services
Mental Health Curriculum Manual**

Title: The Mental Health Curriculum for School Age Children, Ages 10 to 12

Module 4: PACKING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH BAG

Module 4 Overview: This module introduces students to the mental health and mental illness continuum and emphasizes that people can move up and down this continuum every day. Symptoms of anxiety and depression, for example, are normalized as experiences everyone has at one time or another. Where people are on the mental health continuum is determined not only by the good things and stressful things that happen to them, but also by their genetics and their personal resources for coping. Story-telling is used to illustrate how the accumulation of stressful events could cause anyone to have symptoms of mental distress. Students learn that people with very good mental health can have symptoms of stress, anxiety, sadness, grumpiness or crabbiness from time to time when there are lots of stressful things happening in their lives. The focus is on helping students observe their own reactions to stress and recall times when they might have experienced symptoms, and how they coped. Students learn that people with good mental health learn how to pack their own mental health bag of skills and resources to help them get through difficult times or times of high stress without getting symptoms of mental or physical illness, and preventing symptoms of mental distress when possible. Students are reminded about the contribution of genes to mental illness. A “no blame” perspective is conveyed; we can’t choose our genes anymore than our parents or grandparents could choose whether they were born with blonde hair or black hair, or fair skin or brown skin. Students learn that there are many things they can pack in their mental health bag even if they cannot choose their genes. The concept of resilience is introduced as the ability to bounce back from stress and adversity. Tools for mental health include stress management and relaxation training, breathing exercises, brain gym activities, yoga, taking space from conflict, learning to count to 10 before responding in an angry or stressed state, using language to talk about feelings, developing social skills so that you have a support network, finding friends and people to talk to, building relationships with safe adults, using comfort objects or pets, exploring personal strengths and finding time to develop interests and hobbies, learning to give yourself “pats on the back” when you get through something difficult or rewarding yourself for trying. Time is spent talking about the kinds of help available for kids who are experiencing stress and symptoms of mental distress, how to seek help, who to talk to, and how to help their friends who may be having problems.

Module 4 Objectives: After completing this module, students will be able to:

Knowledge Domain:

1. Identify the continuum of mental health and mental illness.
2. Discuss factors and experiences that can move a person up or down the mental health continuum.
3. Name 3 ways they react when they are under lots of stress.
4. Describe positive ways to cope with stress.

5. Identify ways of coping that can cause more harm to the body or to relationships.
6. Describe coping resources that promote mental health and encourage resilience in responding to stress.
7. Name at least 4 personal resources for coping with stress.
8. Describe the positive changes in the body that occur with deep breathing.
9. Identify sources of help for kids who are experiencing stress and symptoms of distress.
10. Describe how to seek help for themselves or their friends who may be having problems.
11. Explore consequences of “not telling” when a friend tells them about a personal problem that could cause mental health symptoms, and asks them to keep it a secret.

Affective Domain:

1. Appreciate their ability to influence their own mental health and resilience during times of stress.
2. Feel empowered and knowledgeable about how to seek help for themselves or others when experiencing personal problems and symptoms of mental distress.
3. Experience greater acceptance of individuals with mental health problems as doing the best they can to cope with multiple factors that influence their place on the mental health continuum.

Talking Points/ Outline for Module 4:

- What this class is about: The mental health continuum and how people move up and down this continuum.
- Relate the role of genetics, current stressors or life changes, and personal resources in determining how a person moves up or down on the mental health continuum.
- Use story-telling to illustrate and normalize how individuals can be faced with multiple changes all at once or have other factors that contribute to symptoms of mental distress.
- Ask students to tell about a time when they experienced stress, describe how they acted and how their bodies felt, name any feelings they were having, and describe what they did to cope with their stress.
- Discuss the concept of resilience as being like a rubber ball that bounces back when it is hit with life problems because it has built-in qualities that allow it to rebound. Identify how individuals can develop their own resilient qualities by “packing their mental health bags” with positive coping tools.
- What are other things to do to relieve stress? Journaling, playing with your pets, listening to music, read an interesting book, taking a hot bath, getting a backrub or a massage, riding your bike, kicking your soccer ball, talking to a friend, telling a joke, taking a “News-fast” or a “TV-fast” so you don’t get so much “bad news” and so many commercial pressures to look a certain way. Also, did you know that tears contain adrenaline and other stress hormones?

So, don't be afraid to cry (William Frey, PhD, Psychiatric Chemist, Franklin Institute, www.fi.edu/brain/relieve.htm)

- What things are NOT helpful in coping with stress? Procrastination – it can make your stress grow bigger if you put off a whole project to the last minute. Other ways that people may try to cope with stress include eating away their stress with foods high in carbohydrates or fats, using drugs and alcohol, or provoking fights to get rid of physical and emotional tensions. (Have students brainstorm other things people might do to cope with stress that cause more harm than help.)
- Discuss tools and resources that have been shown to help people develop resilience, including stress management and relaxation training, breathing exercises, brain gym activities, yoga, taking space from conflict, learning to count to 10 before responding in an angry or distressed state, using words to talk about feelings, developing social skills so that you have a support network, finding friends and people to talk to, building relationships with safe adults, using comfort objects or pets, exploring personal strengths and finding time to develop interests and hobbies, learning to give yourself “pats on the back” when you get through something difficult & reward yourself for trying.
- Demonstrate and practice diaphragmatic breathing
- Give students a big paper bag and ask them to brainstorm what they can pack in their mental health bags that will help them build resilient qualities for coping with stress. Have students name what they already have in their mental health bags and what they would like to add to their bags.
- Use role-playing of situations in which this coping tool would be helpful.
- Select other mental health coping tools for role-playing as time allows.
- Ask students, “What would you do if you were having problems and were just not bouncing back from stress on your own? Who would you talk to?” Discuss how students can seek help for themselves or for a friend. Identify adults in the school that they could talk with, including the school nurse and their classroom teacher. Discuss ways to talk to parents and how to ask them for help with mental health concerns.
- Ask students, “What would you do if a friend told you about a personal problem and said he was feeling very sad and worried, but then asked you not to tell anybody?” Explore with students the myth that keeping secrets means you are a loyal friend. Ask students to think about times when being a good friend means telling someone who can help. Role play scenarios where you take the role of a depressed peer and ask students to practice ways they would talk to their friend about seeking help.
- Giving friends positive affirmations: Encourage students to write a letter to a friend telling them what they like about them. (See stationary, “Thinking of You” from <http://www.faculty.washington.edu/chudler/pdf/station1.pdf>)
- End the class with brain gym exercises to relax and relieve stress.

Parent Letter: (Example attached)

Teacher Letter: (Example attached)

In-Class Overheads:

- OH#1: The Mental Health Continuum (Replicated from Module 1)
Source: Stember, L., Schrinsky, J., & Barnett, K. (2000)
- OH#2: Calvin & Hobbs, “Too Much Stress is Unhealthy You Know!”
Source: Bill Waterson
- OH#3: “Do you ever feel stressed out?”
Source: Illustration from Animation Station.com
- OH#4: “SAD”, Emotional Tears
Source: Alamy images (<http://www.alamy.com>) and Classroom Clip Art (<http://classroomclipart.com>)
- OH#5: Humor, Laughter, and the Brain
Source: Illustration from Arthur’s Medical Library
Animation from Animation Library.com
- OH#6 - #7: Belly Breathing
Source: Stember, L. and Schrinsky, J., 2006

Module Teaching Aides:

- TA #1: Story of child undergoing many changes: 10 Year Old Katelyn
Source: DeSocio, Stember, & Schrinsky, 2005
- TA #2: Story of child undergoing many changes: 12 Year Old Sam
Source: DeSocio, Stember, & Schrinsky, 2005
- TA #3: Paper bags for students to imagine “packing their mental health bags”:
Bring various coping tools: stress balls or silly putty that students can put in their bags.
- TA #4: Demonstrate resilience with a rubber band
Source: Stember, L. & Schrinsky (2005)
Image: www.gettyimages.com
- TA #5: Stationery: “Thinking of You”– Encourage students to use stationery to write a letter to a friend telling them what they like about them.
Source: <http://www.faculty.washington.edu/chudler>
- TA #6: Brain Gym Exercises
Source: Edu-Kinesthetics, Inc
P.O. Box 3395
Ventura, CA, 93006-3395, 1-888-388-9898
www.braingym.com
- TA #7: Word scramble: Ways to help a Friend, developed by Schrinsky, J. (2005)

TA#8: Stress Juggling Balls from Balloons and Rice

Source: Ramsey, J. (2004). Whitman School, Portland, Oregon.

Suggestions for Role Playing: Ask what stress relieving activities would work for each of these events:

1. Worrying about a test
2. Fighting with a friend
3. Feeling tired when you have lots of work to do
4. Feeling bored and nobody is around – there is nothing to do
5. Feeling lonely – your best friend moved away
6. Feeling sick and you have to stay home
7. Feeling jealous because your friend is going on a trip to Disney Land and you have to stay home
8. Feeling angry because someone is saying mean things about you at school to other kids.

Get other examples from students in your class and ask them to tell what they did to handle it.

Pre and Post Test Questions for Module 4:

True or False: 1. Finding someone you trust to talk to can help when you are feeling sad, angry, or worried.

True or False: 2. Laughing and humor or jokes is a good way to relieve stress.

True or False: 3. Eating candy, ice cream, and chips while watching TV builds physical resilience for handling stress.

True or False: 4. Putting homework off until the last minute makes stress worse.

Module 4 Resource List:

www.kidshealth.org

National Mental Health Services Knowledge Exchange Network:

www.mentalhealth.org

National Mental Health Association website: www.nmha.org

www.faculty.washington.edu/chudler/chmodel.html

Neuroscience for Kids – Laughter and the Brain

Society for Neuroscience (2001). Brain Briefings: Humor, Laughter, & the Brain.

Hipp, Earl, Fighting Invisible Tigers, A Stress Management Guide for Teens, Minneapolis, MN, Free Spirit Publishing, Inc., 1995

Moser, Adolph, Ed.D., Don't Pop Your Cork on Mondays!, Kansas City, MO, Landmark Editions, Inc., 1988