

2nd
EDITION

Break Free From Depression



A 4-Module Depression Awareness Curriculum for students in grades 9-12 designed by the Swensrud Depression Prevention Initiative (SDPI), a part of Children's Hospital Neighborhood Partnerships in the Department of Psychiatry at Boston Children's Hospital.



Boston Children's Hospital
Until every child is well™

Chapter 4

Supplementary Activities for Building Coping Skills

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Supplementary Activities for Building Coping Skills

Supplemental Lessons

This chapter offers a variety of activities focused on building students' coping skills. While these skills are often components of treatment for people struggling with mood disorders, the skills are helpful to everyone, regardless of whether or not they are struggling emotionally. The activities range from individual-based skill building, to communication-based skills, to group activities that can be part of the school's overall mission to raise awareness of depression and decrease stigma related to mental illness.

Activities for Building Coping Skills

Introductory Activity: Introduction to Journaling

Estimated Time:

- 10-15 minutes

Description of Activity

- Journals can be helpful tools for students, both for the therapeutic effect of journaling, and for recording their progress with various coping skills/techniques. This activity offers an opportunity for students to assess their stress management techniques and daily coping skills. While prompt questions are provided below, teachers and students are also encouraged to generate some prompt questions that best fit the needs of their classroom.

Materials Needed

- Journals
- Pens/Pencils
- 5 Questions (see below) written on the board.
 1. What kinds of situations have been most stressful for me?

2. How have those events typically affected me?
3. Have I found it helpful to seek help from others? Who has been helpful?
4. What have I learned about myself and my interactions with others when I get stressed?
5. What has helped me feel more hopeful or successful?

Individual-Based Activities

While the activities in this section will be presented to the class (or group of students) as a whole, each activity focuses on skills that students can work on and practice individually. Below are the five skills that will be introduced:

1. Breathing Exercise
2. Muscle Relaxation
3. Imagery/Visualization

4. Problem Solving
5. Challenging Negative Thoughts

Activity 1: Deep Breathing Exercise

Estimated Time:

- 5 minutes

Description of Activity:

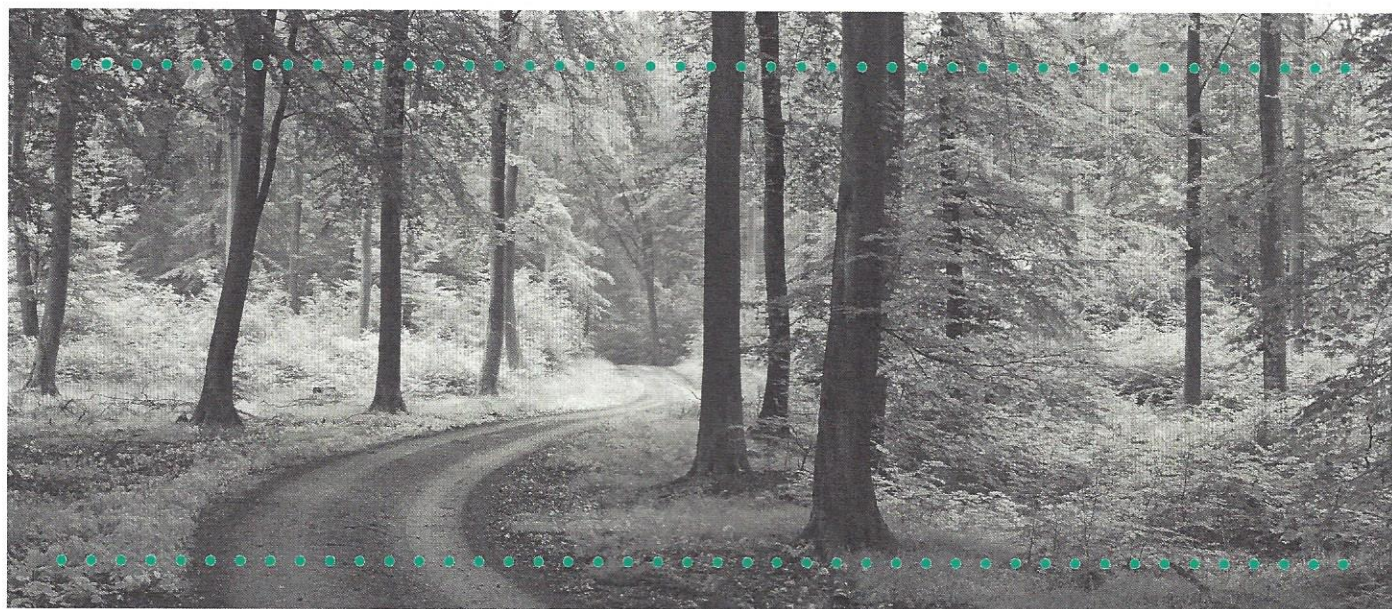
- In this activity, students will learn a deep breathing technique used for relaxation and stress management.

Materials Needed:

- Script (see on next page)

Presenter Instructions:

1. Ask students to sit comfortably in a chair. Give students the option to close their eyes, look down at their desk, or look down at the floor while doing this exercise. Guide



students through the exercise by providing the following instructions:



“Put one hand on your abdomen. Concentrate on taking deep slow breaths, so that you can feel your abdomen going in and out as you breathe. Sometimes it can help to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. You might want to try counting to yourself as you breathe in and out. You can also repeat a word to yourself each time you take a breath, like “strong,” or “calm,” or “relax.” Take a few minutes right now to just practice taking deep breaths in and out.”

- *“This kind of breathing exercise takes practice. Try practicing for a few minutes every day when you are feeling calm. If you get used to doing this while you are feeling calm, you will be able to use it when you are feeling stressed, like right before a test.”*

Activity 2: Muscle Relaxation

Estimated Time:

- 10-15 minutes (time may be decreased by shortening the script)

Description of Activity:

- In this activity, students will learn a muscle relaxation technique used for relaxation and stress management.

Materials Needed:

- Script (see in next column)

Presenter Instructions:

1. Ask students to sit comfortably in a chair. Give students the option to close their eyes, look down at their desk, or look down at the floor while doing this exercise. Guide students through the exercise by providing the following instructions:



“This exercise is used to help you relieve some tension by focusing on relaxing your muscles. I will ask you to tense a specific muscle group for 5 seconds and then relax it for 10 seconds. While relaxing your muscles, do so completely and let the muscle go limp. While relaxing, try to remember the pleasant feeling of the moment.”

- *“Hold your right arm straight out in front of you and bend your hand upward, pointing your fingers toward the ceiling. Hold that tension. (Count 5 seconds) Now relax and let your arm drop to your side.” (Count 10 seconds)*
- *“Hold your left arm straight out in front of you and bend your hand upward pointing your fingers toward the ceiling. Hold that tension.” (Count 5 seconds) Now relax and let your arm drop to your side.” (Count 10 seconds)*
- *“Shrug your shoulders, raising them as high as possible.” (Count 5 seconds) Now relax and let your shoulders drop down.” (Count 10 seconds)*
- *“Sit up straight in your chair. Arch your back as much as you can.” (Count 5*

seconds) *“Now relax and sit back in your chair.”* (Count 10 seconds)

- *“Close your eyes tightly. (Count 5 seconds) Now relax and leave them softly closed.”* (Count 10 seconds)
- *“Tighten your jaw muscles as much as you can, clenching your teeth together. (Count 5 seconds) Now relax your jaw muscles and unclench your teeth.”* (Count 10 seconds)
- *“Bend your neck forward, trying to touch your chin to your chest. (Count 5 seconds) Now slowly bring your neck back upright.”* (Count 10 seconds)
- *“Straighten both legs out in front of you, stretching them outward and tensing all the muscles. (Count 5 seconds) Now let them relax and slowly bring them back down to the floor.”* (Count 10 seconds)
- *“Take three nice deep breaths, and remember your feeling of relaxation and calm.”*

Questions for students:

1. “Does your body feel any different after the exercise? How?”
2. “Was there any part of the exercise that was difficult for you?”

Activity 3: Guided Imagery and Visualization

Estimated Time:

- 10-15 minutes (time may be decreased by shortening the script)

Description of Activity:

- In this activity, students will learn a guided imagery technique used for relaxation and stress management.



For some students, closing their eyes and participating in a guided visualization exercise may be uncomfortable, or may evoke unpleasant memories. Offer students the option of not participating if they feel uncomfortable.

Materials Needed:

- Script (see below)

Presenter Instructions:

1. **Script 1:** Ask students to sit comfortably in a chair. Give students the option to close their eyes, look down at their desk, or look down at the floor while doing this exercise. Guide students through the exercise with the following script:



“Something that can be very helpful when you are feeling stressed is to picture (or visualize) yourself in a place that feels relaxing and peaceful to you. This could be the beach or a favorite room in your house. It could even be a place that you’ve dreamed of but have never been to. When you construct this picture in your mind, the more senses you use, the stronger the image and therefore the stronger the sensation of relaxation will be. For some people, seeing pictures might come more easily, whereas for some, hearing sounds or even smelling things in their imagination might be easier. As we go through a visualization exercise,

remember that there are no right or wrong answers and your imagination is limitless.”

- “Choose a relaxing scene. Think of the most relaxing place you have ever been. The place can be real, or it can be imagined. For example, your place can be the beach, or it can be a castle in the clouds. When you have chosen your place try to imagine it using all your senses - sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, and temperature. Create as much detail in your mind as possible.”
- “Now chose a word or phrase that will help you recall this scene (e.g., ocean, my relaxing spot). Take a few deep breaths, and go through your scene in your mind.” (Allow about 5-10 minutes to practice).
- “As you become more confident in using this imagery technique, try using it during the course of your day. You can practice during a study period, for example, or on your way to school. Try to practice at least two times per day, and repeat your word or phrase several times to yourself at the end of your practice when you are relaxed.”

Questions for students:

1. “Any volunteers to share their scene?”
 2. “What part of the exercise was most relaxing for you?”
- **Script 2:** Ask students to sit comfortably in a chair. Give students the option to close their eyes, look down at their desk, or look down at the floor while doing this exercise. Guide students through the exercise with the following script:



“Sit in a comfortable position with your arms and legs uncrossed. Let your eyes focus gently on a point in front of you. Begin with slow, rhythmic breathing, focusing on every breath – feel where the breath is in your body, focus on that sensation with the knowledge that your body knows how to find comfort and how to control the breathing process without you having to concentrate on it.”

- “As you continue to feel relaxed and calm, experience the sense of relaxation that you feel in your body. Notice that the muscles in your feet, legs, hips, chest, arms, back, neck, and head are feeling looser and more relaxed. Feel the tension leaving your body as you experience warmth and comfort. The warmth is spreading through your body and along with it comes comfort and relaxation.”
- “Now imagine that there is a large, open pouch in front of you. Into this pouch, put all your worries, fears, and anxieties. Imagine the anxiety, fears, and worries as a gray mist that comes out of your body every time you exhale. As it comes out, it goes into this pouch and cannot re-enter your body. Visualize the gray mist entering the pouch and feel the warmth that enters your body as a result of having the anxiety, worries, and fears leave it. When you are ready, close the pouch and feel comfort in knowing that the fears and worries will not come back into your body. Focus on the feeling of warmth throughout your body.”

Activity 4: Learning the PIP! (Problem, Ideas and Plan)

Estimated Time:

- 30 minutes (time may be added to practice individually or in groups)

Description of Activity:

- This activity presents a brief and accessible model for problem solving. Research findings indicate that deficits in problem-solving abilities are related to the development and maintenance of depressive disorders in adolescents. Therefore, a problem solving approach is an important strategy for prevention and skill building.

Materials Needed:

- PIP Handout for Students (page 62 and 63)

Presenter Instructions:

1. Distribute PIP Handout to students
2. Introduce the activity: *“Today we will be learning about “Problem, Ideas, and Plan”, a new approach to problem solving. Please think about a particular problem that you would like help with solving. We will use the PIP worksheet to address your problem.”*
3. *“First, I need each of you write down some information about a problem that has been on your mind. Take one minute to choose the problem and write it down.”*

4. *“Next, I need you to create at least three different ways to rephrase the problem starting with ‘How to.’ For example, if my problem were that I’m always feeling exhausted, I might write: How could I feel more energetic? How could I get more sleep? How could I organize everything I have to do better so I have more time to relax?”*
5. *“From the questions that you just wrote down, select the one that you think is really the most important or most relevant question for your problem.”*
6. *“Now that you’ve identified your reworded problem, please find a partner.”*
7. *“You and your partner will together generate ideas for addressing each of your problems.”*
8. *“When you are first trying to generate ideas, use DIVERGENT THINKING. Divergent thinking is when you come up with as many ideas as you can, suspending all judgment or value on the idea. Be as creative as you can - the goal here is quantity over quality. You can build on each other’s ideas and anything goes! Take turns generating a list of ideas as you use divergent thinking for each of your problems.” (allow for 5 minutes of divergent thinking)*
9. *“Now look at your list of options and use CONVERGENT THINKING to choose the one idea you like the most. When you use convergent thinking, you focus on*

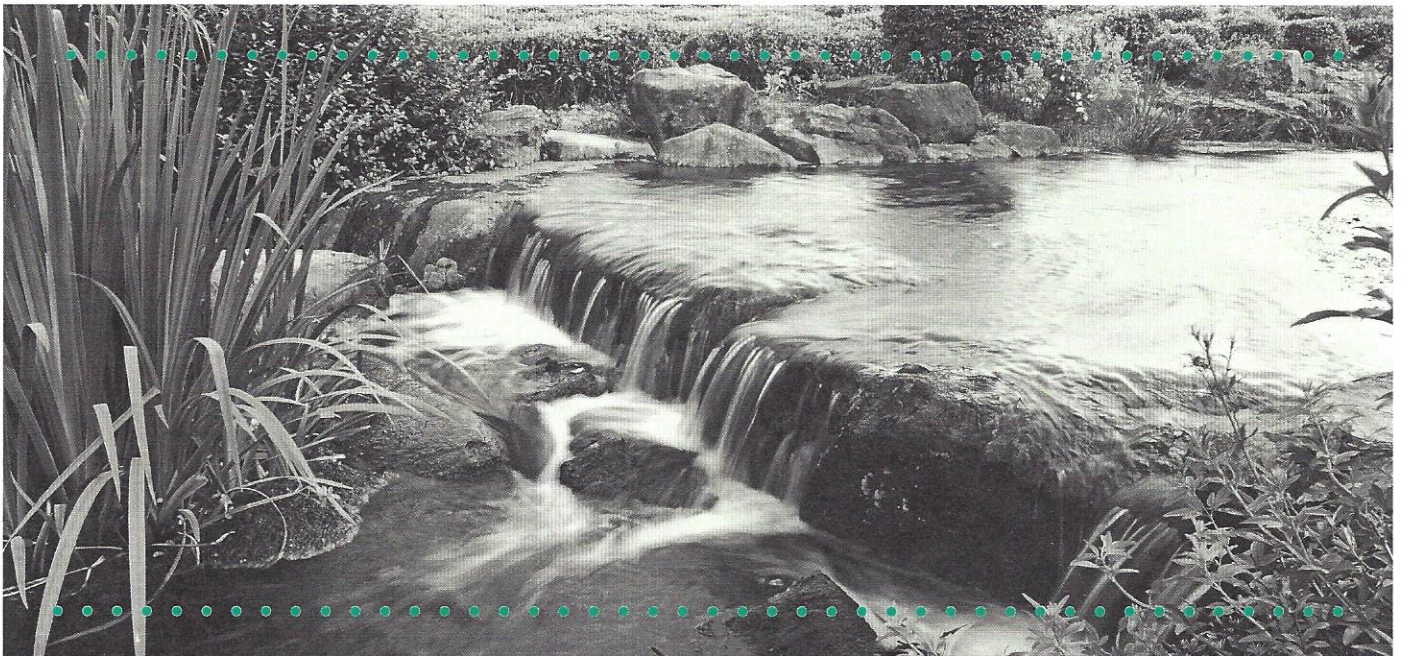
ideas that seem realistic and helpful. You consider new approaches that improve on what you have done in the past.” (allow for 5 minutes of convergent thinking)

10. *“Once you have chosen the one idea you like most, write it down on your worksheet.”*

11. *“Now it is time to create an action plan. On your worksheet, write down the list of steps that you will take to complete your proposed solution. Who is going to do what? By when? Make sure you include the due dates, with at least one action step set to take place within 24 hours.”*

Student Discussion:

- Encourage students to share with the larger group what they have written on their worksheets. Ask how the process was helpful in finding potential new solutions.



Student Worksheet – PIP (Problems, Ideas, Plans)

Problem: What is on your mind? With what would you like help in solving?

From what you wrote above, create at least three ways to rephrase the problem starting with “**How could I:**”

How could I...

How could I...

How could I...

From the list above, select the most important question to answer and write it below.

How could I...

Divergent Thinking: Generate at least 6 ideas for answering the question above.

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

Convergent Thinking: From the list above, choose the best idea and create a solution statement that begins with the phrase “What I see myself doing is...”

What I see myself doing is...

Reread your solution statement and create an action plan that lists who is going to do what, and by when. Make sure your entry for “by when” is an actual date (for example, by July 4th).

Use the template on the next page to create your action plan. Write at least 5 action steps. Make sure there is an action scheduled to be completed within the next 24 hours. This builds momentum and keeps you focused!

	WHO?	DOES WHAT?	BY WHEN?
1) Example	Me	Buy a planner to schedule my activities	Today after school
2)			
3)			
4)			
5)			
6)			

We are grateful to Russ Schoen and Gloria Rapport for their assistance in the creation of this activity. For information on creative problem solving, see www.creativeyouthleadership.org

Activity 5: Avoiding the “NASTY” Trap: Catching Your Negative Thoughts

Estimated Time:

- 15-20 minutes (time may be increased to encourage practicing the skill in pairs or groups)

Description of Activity:

- In this activity, students will learn how thoughts can impact feelings. They will learn an acronym for remembering “thought traps” and practice how to change negative thinking to more positive thinking.

Materials Needed:

- Scripts (see below)

Presenter Instructions:

1. Guide students through this exercise by using the following script:



“The school’s football team is about to face your rival school for a championship game. Everyone is energized; the coach tells everyone how hard the team has been preparing, that they are ready, and that we are certain to win the game. Everyone is shouting words of encouragement and the atmosphere is thick with excitement.”

- “What kinds of thoughts do you think are going through the students’ minds?”
- “How do you think the football players are feeling?”
- “Now picture this: Your teacher just handed you a make up exam to make up for the one you missed when you were absent.

She tells you this test is harder than the original one, and that only a few students have passed. She says you should expect to be confused and you may not understand all the questions. She also tells you that your score on this exam will count for 40% of your class grade.”

- “What kinds of thoughts are going through your head right now?”
 - “How are you feeling?”
 - “As you can see, our thoughts can significantly impact how we feel. If we have positive thoughts, we are likely to be in a good mood. If we have negative thoughts, we are likely to feel worried, anxious, or sad. When people experience stress or are upset, there are some “thought traps” that they may easily step into. Once they fall in these traps, they are likely to feel even more anxious or upset. Let’s review a particular thought trap – the “NASTY”. Encourage students to try to figure out what each letter stands for:
- N: NEVER** (“I am never going to figure out this statistics homework.”)
- A: ALWAYS** (“I always mess up in relationships.”)
- S: SHOULD HAVE** (“I should have known that, how could I be so stupid.”)
- T: TOTAL DISASTER** (“I don’t want to do the speech in class. If I do I just know I will mess up and everyone will make fun of me.”)
- Y: WHY BOTHER:** (“Things will always be bad, so why bother to change?”)
- “Whenever you get caught in the NASTY trap, you are likely to feel hopeless, and

helpless, and it can be difficult to think of change or new alternatives. These negative thoughts are likely to limit your options and negatively impact the way you feel and the way you expect things to turn out.”

- “So, what can you do to feel better and less stressed? Learn to identify these negative thoughts, catch them early, get rid of them, and replace them with positive thoughts. Here are some alternative positive thoughts”:

- “This is a really bad situation, but there are things I can do to make it better. Things will get better.”
- “I messed up this time, but next time I will be prepared and will do better.”
- “I can succeed at this if I try.”
- “It’s ok to make mistakes every once in a while, no one is perfect.”



Encourage students to come up with more examples of negative thoughts and the corresponding countering positive thoughts to counter them. Record student responses in a table on the board, using two columns – one labeled “Negative Thoughts,” and the other labeled “Positive Thoughts”. Students can continue to practice either in pairs, or in small groups.

Interactive Activities – How To Help A Friend:

In our experience, students truly value learning specific skills for how to help their friends. Below are three interactive activities where students will learn stress management and communication skills. Of note, if students are specifically concerned about what to do if a friend is depressed or suicidal,

there are recommended steps in handouts found in Appendix C of this manual.

1. Sharing Positive Qualities
2. Identifying Ways to Handle Stress
3. Practicing Communication Skills

Activity 6: Compliments

Estimated Time:

- 15 minutes (time may be increased by encouraging students to share out loud what others wrote on their card)

Description of Activity:

- This exercise works best in small groups; its goal is to have all students write on each other’s card.
- In this activity, students will share positive feedback with their peers.

Materials Needed:

- 3x5 index cards or colored paper
- Markers

Presenter Instructions:

1. Distribute 3x5 cards (or colored paper) and markers to each student.
2. Ask every student to walk up to each peer; on each peer’s card, the student should write a characteristic that he/she likes about the peer, a special talent he/she observes in the peer, or something he/she appreciates about the peer.
3. Emphasize that this activity is about giving positive feedback to peers. All written comments should be kind and genuine.

4. At the end of the activity, every student should have a card with multiple entries on it added by his or her peers.
5. If students feel comfortable doing so, encourage them to share what others wrote about them.

Activity 7: Beating Stress Before It Beats You – The Top Ten Approach

Estimated Time:

- 30 minutes

Description of Activity:

- In this activity, students will learn about stress, discuss healthy vs. unhealthy ways of managing stress, and come up with their “Top Ten Ways to Battle Stress.” They will also come together as a group to vote on the top ten list of stress reduction techniques to use in their classroom.

Materials Needed:

- Index cards (one per student)
- Copies of Stress Management Plan
- A chalkboard, a dry-erase board OR large easel papers to record student responses
- Large poster board to record the class top ten list of stress reduction ideas

Presenter Instructions:

1. Prior to introducing students to this activity, it is important to spend a few minutes reminding them about the difference between stress and depression.
 - “Let’s talk about stress... What is stress?”

(Stress can be defined as any circumstance that is positive (e.g., moving, applying for college, becoming captain of the football team) or negative (e.g., illness in the family, too much homework, argument with parent) that impacts a person’s physical and emotional state. Common student responses include: something that changes your routine, something bad, too much to handle at once, feeling like you have too much to do and too little time.

- “What are some of the stressors that you face?”

(Common student responses include: friends, parents, school, homework, pressure to act a certain way, pressure to get into college, fight with significant other, financial problems, illness in the family, death/loss)

- “How do you know you are feeling stressed? What are some of the signs/symptoms?”
(Encourage students to write down their own signs and symptoms of stress on the handout.)

(Common student responses include: headaches, nervousness, edginess, irritability, short-fuse, tiredness, sleeping too much/ too little, changes in eating habits, stomachaches, feeling of “butterflies” in your stomach, feeling overwhelmed, guilt, sadness, feeling upset, reduced concentration, forgetfulness, restlessness, muscle tension.)

- “What are some ways to deal with stress?”
(Encourage students to write down on the handout what works best for them in terms of managing stress)

(Common student responses include: listen to music, exercise, punch a pillow, talk to a friend, go out and do something

fun, stop procrastinating, take a bath, buy something you like, reward yourself for finishing a project, ask someone for help.)

- Some additional ideas include:
 - Don't rely on your memory – write it down
 - Get up 15 minutes earlier
 - Break large tasks into bite size portions
 - Schedule play time into every day
 - Stop saying negative things to yourself
 - Visualize yourself succeeding
 - Listen to music and dance
 - Stop a bad habit
 - Strive for excellence, not perfection
 - Always have a back up plan
 - Keep a journal
 - Do something creative
 - Have a support network of people, places, things
 - Get enough sleep
 - Separate yourself from a stressor (if possible)
 - Say “no” more often; understand your boundaries (for example, do not volunteer for everything or feel like you have to take on every extracurricular activity or sport in order to be successful.
 - Understand that your limits and boundaries are different from those of other people and that comparisons of limits are not necessarily always

accurate or helpful.

- Practice deep breathing exercises.
- Practice visualization and guided imagery exercises.
- After students have provided their responses, give each student an index card.



“Now that we have a list of possible ways to deal with stress, choose your top ten favorite choices and write them down on your index card. This will be your personal reminder of the positive things you can do to cope with stress.”

- Once students have completed their lists, ask them to vote with the class, picking their top ten favorite ways to deal with stress from the possibilities listed on the board. Record these ten stress-reducing strategies on a poster board, and keep them posted in the classroom. Encourage students to use them daily.

Activity 8: What Caring Friends Say

Estimated Time:

- 15-30 minutes (time may be increased by encouraging students to practice with different partners).

Description of Activity:

- In this activity, students will focus on improving their communication with others by learning the skills of active listening, reflection, use of “I” statements, and responding to improve their communication skills with others.

Materials Needed:

- List of skills to work on (written on board to remind students)

Presenter Instructions:

- *“Today we are going to practice four specific skills to help improve our communication with others. The way that we listen and respond plays an important role in how we communicate with others and whether the person we talk to feels heard, understood and supported.”*
- *“The four skills are:”* (describe each skill)
 - **Active listening:**
 - Be attentive
 - Do not interrupt the person who is speaking
 - Use body language to convey that you are listening and interested (e.g., maintain eye contact, lean forward, nod your head)
 - Use brief verbal cues to indicate you are still listening (e.g., “I see,” or “uh-huh”)
 - Do not tell your own story as a response (Do not say things like: “When that happened to me, I ..”)
 - **Reflection:**
 - You repeat what the speaker has said to you as you heard/understood it and ask if you understood correctly (“So what I heard you say was... Is that right?”)
 - When you reflect, you repeat back without adding judgment or criticism (Say: “So what you said

was that you felt you had to quit the team?” instead of: “So what you’re saying is that you’re a quitter?”)

- Try to attend to how the person is feeling, and use their words when reflecting back so they feel understood (“It seems like this is a very frustrating experience for you.”)
- **“I” statements:**
 - These statements let the person know how you feel (“I care about you and am worried about some things. I’ve noticed you seem sad or upset.”)
 - Do not put blame or judgment on the other person (Say this: “I felt very angry” instead of: “You made me so mad I had to yell at you.”)
- **Responding:**
 - Do not assume you know how the person feels (avoid saying things like: “I know exactly how you feel.”)
 - Be curious about how you can best help (Say things like: “How can I help you?” or “What would be most helpful to you right now?”)
 - Offer choices and alternatives (say things like: “I’ve heard Mrs. Thomas is very helpful- would you like for me to walk to her office with you?” or “Would you like me to help you find someone to talk to outside of the school?”)



“Now that we’ve learned these four skills, let’s put them into practice. Find two partners to work with.”

- Explain to students that in each group, there will be three distinct roles:
 - One person (“talker”) talking about a difficult situation he/she has experienced
 - One person (“listener”) who is using the new communication skills
 - One person who is observing how effectively the “listener” is using the communication skills and how the “talker” responds when the skills are or are not used
- All members of the group should have a turn practicing each role. Ask students to take between 5-10 minutes per role.

Student Discussion:

- Encourage students to share their experience of this exercise. What was easiest to do? What was most challenging? How did they feel in each role?

Group/School Activities:

Below are ideas for activities that encourage students to become agents of change within their school. Using their creativity and leadership, students can create projects or presentations that can be part of the school’s overall mission to raise awareness of depression and decrease stigma related to mental illness.

Activity 9: Brainstorming Session

Estimated Time:

- 10 minutes

Description of Activity:

- For this activity, students will brainstorm

ideas on how they can continue education and prevention efforts around depression, both within the school and outside, in their respective communities.

Materials Needed:

- Poster board and markers (to record brainstorming ideas)

Presenter Instructions:

Encourage students to think of ways to maintain open dialogue about depression and other student mental health needs. The following questions may be used as guides for encouraging new ideas during this session:

1. What can the adults in our school do to encourage more open communication around mental illness?
2. Should any of our current procedures or policies be revised? How?
3. What can students do to encourage each other to get help?
4. What can we as a school do to reduce stigma associated with mental illness?
5. What prevention strategies can we use? When would they be most useful and for whom?
6. Are there any special events or programs that we could develop?
7. How can we reach out to the community to continue to educate everyone about depression?

Many exciting opportunities may arise from this brainstorming session – encourage students to find a realistic and viable format for implementing ideas.

Suggested Formats for Group/School Activities

Below are some suggestions for the format of group/school activities:

- **Creating visual displays with information:**

Students may create bulletin boards, posters, library displays, or murals dedicated to sharing information about depression (or other mental illnesses). The purpose of the project may be to raise awareness, advertise types of help or support available in the school, share ideas for healthy coping, or decrease stigma associated with depression or other mental illnesses.

- **Creating visual displays of coping skills:**

Students can decorate a box and place it in their classroom. The purpose of the box is to create a container full of ideas for healthy coping. Ideas for contents of the box include notes on helpful tips for dealing with stress, pictures (ones that are calming, funny, or motivational), inspirational quotes, poems, names of helpful people, etc. Students may look into the box whenever they are stressed, overwhelmed, or unable to come up with new alternatives for coping. They can also contribute content to the box that they think will be helpful for their peers.

- **Creating Skits or Public Service Announcements (PSA):**

Students can create skits or public service announcements focusing on raising awareness, teaching new skills, or combating stigma. They can apply the information learned in the four modules and make it relevant to their everyday school and social experiences. The skits may be presented in a parent meeting, in school assemblies, or as part of a wellness fair.

- **Students Teaching Students:**

Older students who have participated in the Break Free From Depression Program may co-lead (with school staff) the four modules when they are presented to younger students in their school (e.g., 12th graders teaching 9th graders).





Helping Your Friends Through Tough Times – Dos and Don'ts

How Can I Tell If Someone Is Struggling With Depression?

If you are worried about possible depression in someone, here are some key things to look for:

- Change in mood for over two weeks
- Isolation from other people and/or changes in relationships
- Not doing things he/she typically likes to do
- Change in eating or sleeping habits; lack of energy or feeling tired
- Seeming sad, withdrawn, or angry
- Increase in negative self-talk
- Talking about death or suicide
- Picking fights; getting into trouble; using drugs or alcohol
- Difficulties in school
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Chronic stomach ache/ headache

How Can I Encourage Someone To Get Help?

Helping a friend who may be depressed can be challenging. It's perfectly normal to feel a variety of emotions (overwhelmed, confused, or angry) during your efforts. Helping a friend does not mean you are responsible for fixing their depression. What you can offer is a listening ear, support, and encouragement to seek help. Seek the help of a trusted adult – you are not expected to do this alone!

Do: What Might Be Helpful?

- It is ok to talk to someone and let them know that you have been noticing changes. Use open-ended questions like “How are things going for you? I noticed you seem different lately, can you tell me how you are feeling?”
- Let your friend know that you are there to listen and support, not judge or criticize.
- Offer your friend choices regarding how to get help, including websites, phone numbers for crisis hotlines, or numbers for helpful adults in school or in the community.
- If you think a friend needs help, encourage him/her to get help from a professional. Do not try to solve the problem yourself, but instead offer to help with making phone calls or going to appointments.

- When you are really worried about someone's safety, it is ok to talk to them about it. It is a myth that if you ask someone about suicidal thoughts you will be introducing new ideas. If you are worried about your friend's safety – ask and listen!
- Suicide hotline: 1-800-273-TALK; Teen Help Line: 978-688-TEEN (8336)

Don't: What Might Not Be So Helpful?

- Trying to solve your friend's problems by yourself is not helpful for him/her or for you. Seek professional advice and support from trusted adults!
- Do not avoid the person. You do not have to have all the answers – just be a good listener.
- People who struggle with depression often feel like everything is their fault, or that they just cannot do things right. Statements like this might make them feel worse: “Snap out of it,” “Get your act together,” “You have so much to be happy about,” “Get over it,” “I know exactly how you feel,” “If you just try hard enough things will be better,” or “You're being too sensitive.”