

Mental Health Activities for the Classroom

Activities were taken from *Classroom Mental Health: A toolkit for high school teachers*. For more information, visit <https://www.classroommentalhealth.org>. This site is informative for all teachers and many of the activities can be adapted for students in any grade level. It is recommended that you consult with your school support staff for assistance in selecting activities that would be most appropriate for your classroom.

The Safe Deposit Box

Requirements:

1. Box with a slotted lid
2. Index cards or slips of paper

How it works:

1. Create a box with a slot for depositing slips of paper (could be a shoebox) and label it "The Safe Deposit Box."
2. Announce that if a student is concerned about a fellow student's physical or emotional health, he/she can leave a note in the box with the classmate's name and their concern. Reassure students that the box will be checked regularly by the school counselor or social worker, who will follow up.
3. Explain that remaining anonymous can be a less stressful way to voice your concerns; it is neither punishment nor "ratting people out."

The benefits:

- Reinforces that "we are all in this together."
- Shows that you are working together and making time/space for further discussion and help.
- Makes students feel that they are heard.
- Empowers students to advocate for themselves and each other.



Health Resource “Commercial Breaks”

Requirements:

1. List of available resources
2. Sample script - highlighting the guidance counselor (see next page)
3. 10 minutes of class time per use

How it works:

1. Ask your school counselor, psychologist, or social worker for a list of available mental health and counseling resources.
2. For the first “commercial break,” insert the name and contact information of the school counselor or other mental health professional into the script.
3. Announce that *“class will be interrupted for a ‘commercial break’ brought to you by the many people who care about you here at school.”*
4. Read the prepared script OR ask for a volunteer from the class to read the script.

Additional “commercials:”

- Divide the class into teams, give each team one of the resources on the list, and have them each create their own scripts and perform their own “commercial” promoting the resource, perhaps for extra credit.

The benefits:

- Reinforces that there are many places students can go if they need answers or help.
- Helps reinforce the stigma of asking for help, normalizing that everyone needs help sometimes.



Health Resource “Commercial Breaks - Script

Read the following opening line, in the manner of a newscaster:

We'll return to today's thrilling lesson after a brief message by the sponsor of today's class, Your Brain.

Next. Read the following script, (describing how a person's brain talks to the person about getting help dealing with an emotional concern from the school's mental health professional):

Hi. It's me, your brain. You bring me with you everywhere – I think you even brought me to school today (hope you're using me now!).

Sure, I'm pretty good at thinking, but I do so much more. I also hold on to your feelings – the happy ones, and the crappy ones. My job isn't easy, and I'm not just talking about studying. When you feel down, or scared, or anxious, I work overtime, and sometimes those hard emotions are just too much for me to handle on my own.

I talk to you all the time, and I know you're always there for me, but I can't help but think (because that's what I do!) that when we're concerned or hurting, we shouldn't go it alone. We should find someone else to talk to.

Here's a thought: I've heard our school's guidance counselor can be really helpful. She's a good listener, she never disrespects, and kids trust her. She's available during school hours, and we can make an appointment.

What do you think? Oh, yeah, that's my job! I think we should make an appointment to talk to her.

Close by reading the final line, again in the manner of a newscaster:

This message was brought to you by your brain. Take care of it. It's the only one you've got.

The Check-In

Requirements:

1. 5 minutes of class time per use
2. Optional: Student "Check-In" worksheet (see next page)

How it works:

1. Make an announcement to the class by saying something like this:
 - a. We're all going to take a few moments to 'check-in' with ourselves. This is a chance for each of us to recognize how we're feeling and acknowledge any worries or concerns that may be bothering us.
 - b. On a scale of one to ten, with ten feeling on top of the world, rate how you're feeling right now.
 - c. Now let's do a deep breathing activity, taking slow, deliberate breaths by inhaling for 4 seconds and exhaling for 6 seconds. We will do this for one minute.
 - d. After doing this exercise, now rate your mood again.
 - e. You don't have to share your number with anyone. But if it's particularly low today, say, four or lower, I'm available (specific time) if you want to talk.
2. If desired, distribute the "Check-In" worksheet to facilitate this exercise and provide more detail.

The benefits:

- This brief intervention gives student a safe space to recognize their feelings and concerns.
- When used at the beginning of class, it may be enough to help students let go of some of their anxiety and focus on class.



Student Check-in

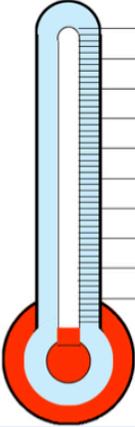
Name: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

What are you feeling right now? Pick up to 3.

| | | | |
|-------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| SAD | ANNOYED | FRUSTRATED | ANGRY |
| STRESSED | NERVOUS | JITTERY | TIRED |
| SCARED | DISAPPOINTED | LONELY | DEPRESSED |
| OVERWHELMED | HOPELESS | TEARFUL | SHOCKED |
| PANICKED | AFRAID | WORRIED | Other: _____ |

How intensely do you feel this way? Rate each feeling on a scale of 1-10.

| | |
|---|-------------------|
|  <p>10 <i>This is the strongest I've EVER felt this way!</i></p> <p>9</p> <p>8 <i>This feeling is very strong.</i></p> <p>7</p> <p>6 <i>The intensity of this feeling is pretty average.</i></p> <p>5</p> <p>4 <i>This feeling is pretty mild.</i></p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1 <i>This feeling is barely noticeable.</i></p> | Feeling #1: _____ |
| | Rating: ____ |
| | Feeling #2: _____ |
| | Rating: ____ |
| | Feeling #3: _____ |
| | Rating: ____ |

What event or situation was going on when you started to feel upset?

When we are in difficult situations or experience something upsetting, it's common to have **automatic thoughts** – thoughts that jump into our minds and feel very real but are not 100% true. Sometimes these thoughts ARE true, but they're just not helpful to focus on. Untrue or unhelpful thoughts are called "Thinking Traps".

Write down 2 thoughts you had in this situation:

1)

2)

Check the box next to the kinds of thinking traps these might be:

| | Type of thinking trap: | Example: |
|--|------------------------|---|
| | Overgeneralization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I always mess everything up!" • "Everything I do turns out badly." |
| | Mind Reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "She didn't say hi to me because she's mad at me." • "The teacher didn't call on me because he doesn't like me." |
| | Fortune Telling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I'm going to fail the test." • "They're going to laugh at me." |
| | Catastrophizing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "This is going to be a total disaster!" • "This is the worst day of my life." |
| | What ifs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "What if people think I'm an idiot?" |
| | True but unhelpful | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My boyfriend cheated on me." • "No one invited me to hang out this weekend." |
| | Other: | |

Try one of the coping skills below for 5-10 minutes (or define your own coping skill):

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deep breathing | <input type="checkbox"/> Ice cube activity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mindful eating | <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to calming music |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4-7-8 breathing | <input type="checkbox"/> Yoga |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guided meditation | <input type="checkbox"/> Progressive muscle relaxation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visualization | <input type="checkbox"/> Making a plan to solve the problem |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creating a coping thought | <input type="checkbox"/> Art |

What is your main feeling now? _____ Rate it 1-10: _____

Are you ready to go back to class now? If not, what do you need help with?

