

Because we don't wear our

thoughts on our sleeves



## DEAR EDUCATOR,

As a teacher, you know that mental health plays an important part in every child's academic success. Schools and teachers are influential in the lives of students since a lot of their time is spent in school. For this reason, teachers are key in supporting wellness strategies that contribute to a positive academic experience.

Did you know that one in five children is living with a mental illness, and 50% of all lifetime mental illnesses start by age 14? Not only is it important to work individually with students who experience mental health challenges, but it is critical that we make sure every child feels comfortable talking about mental health and learns coping strategies.

To help you start this important conversation with your students, the curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired (YMI) have teamed up with Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Harlem Globetrotters to create this classroom program as part of the *On Our Sleeves*® movement to break the silence and stigma surrounding children's mental health.

The *Share Your Feelings* program includes classroom activities to provide students with coping strategies that can help them overcome problems, manage relationships and school, and learn how to make themselves feel better. Students also learn tips to support their peers who may be experiencing mental health challenges. The activities reinforce social-emotional learning and language arts standards, and are designed to help you build a safe and empathetic classroom environment. The program also includes a letter for parents and guardians that we encourage you to send home to raise awareness about children's mental health and provide families with tips for speaking with children about this topic.

We hope you will share this program with other teachers at your school, as well as your school nurse and guidance counselors, to help break the stigma and expand the dialogue about mental health. Please take a moment to share your thoughts on these materials at [ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves](http://ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves). We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dominic Kinsley  
Editor in Chief  
Young Minds Inspired

### ON OUR SLEEVES®

The Movement for Children's Mental Health



THE ORIGINAL  
**HARLEM**  
GLOBETROTTERS

Questions? Contact YMI toll-free at 1-800-859-8005, or by email at [feedback@ymiclassroom.com](mailto:feedback@ymiclassroom.com).

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### Target Audience

Students in grades 3-5 and their families

### Program Objectives

- ▶ Promote awareness of children's mental health and help break the stigma of mental health
- ▶ Provide children with tools and strategies for coping with feelings, including how to talk to a trusted adult
- ▶ Provide families with resources about children's mental health and tips for engaging their children in conversation to help them with coping strategies

### Program Components

- ▶ This teacher's guide
- ▶ Two reproducible activity sheets
- ▶ A two-page family take-home letter
- ▶ A standards alignment chart, available at [ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves](http://ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves)
- ▶ An online feedback form at [ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves](http://ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves)



## How to Use This Program

- ▶ Photocopy this teacher's guide and the student activity sheets, and review the materials and resources before starting. For background information on mental health, go to [ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves](http://ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves).
- ▶ Introduce the concept of mental health in Activity One. Each activity should take approximately 40 to 45 minutes. Extend as needed to continue the discussion.
- ▶ Encourage students to take the completed activity sheets home to share with their families. Also give them copies of the family take-home letter or include a link to the PDF in an email to parents and guardians. The letter includes tips to help families navigate discussions about mental health.
- ▶ Be prepared for questions and know your school's policy on mental health concerns. If a student reacts to the discussion or content, validate their feelings even if you don't understand the emotional response. Ask open-ended questions and don't get to a solution too quickly. Ask: *How can I help? What would help in this moment? What do you need to feel better?* Ask who their favorite person (adult) is at school and seek their assistance. Call parents if needed.
- ▶ If students comment that they sometimes hurt themselves to make themselves feel better, be prepared to respond in the moment and know who to notify and what kind of resources or professional help you might need.

### Activity One

## My Feelings, My Strategies

Your students may be familiar with certain mental health conditions and concerns, but may not be familiar with the term *mental health* or understand what it means. To help you start a classroom discussion about mental health, this activity focuses on feelings and coping strategies, while reinforcing the importance of talking to a trusted adult when students are overwhelmed by their feelings or when they are not sure how to manage them.

1. To introduce the topic, ask students to identify emotions or feelings and write them on the board.
2. Next, write the word *rain* on the board and ask students to write down how rain makes them feel, then share their responses. Are they all the same? Explain that rain may make people feel different ways—happy, sad, stressed, annoyed, etc. Add that this was a simple example to show students that we can all feel differently about a situation, and that our own feelings may change.
3. Next, ask students how people express their emotions or what they may be thinking. Answers may include facial expressions, actions, and words. Explain that people don't always say how they are feeling or what they are thinking. They may be concerned about showing their emotions or sharing their thoughts, or they may not know how to do so. And, we can't always assume we know how someone feels or what someone is thinking if they don't tell us.
4. Have students share their thoughts about mental health by asking the following questions and guiding the discussion with the notes in parentheses:
  - ▶ *Have you ever seen a TV show or movie that talked about mental health? If so, what does it mean?*



- ▶ *What do you know about mental health? What have others said about it?* (Explain that we all experience feelings like sadness, anxiety, fear, worry, confusion, stress, irritability, etc., at times, but some people can experience these types of feelings more intensely and for longer periods of time and may need help and support to cope with their feelings. As friends, we want to support others who may be experiencing this and never make fun of them.)
  - ▶ *What are ways we can talk to our parents about mental health?* (Share things that concern us, tell them how we feel, ask for help, etc.)
  - ▶ *What are some things we do every day to help us stay physically healthy?* (Eat healthy foods, exercise, sleep, drink water, etc.)
  - ▶ *What are some ways we can stay mentally healthy every day?* (Engage in activities, do things with other people, rest our minds, exercise, take breaks from work, help others, etc.)
  - ▶ *What does the term "trusted adult" mean?* (A grown-up who makes you feel comfortable, and will listen and support you)
  - ▶ *How can we start talking about mental health with a trusted adult?* (Tell them that we have a concern or tell them how we're feeling. Be open and tell them we want to talk to get advice.)
  - ▶ *How do you deal with stressful situations? What do you do to make yourself feel good?* (See next page.)
5. Review and expand upon students' answers about how they deal with stressful situations. Explain that stress is a common part of every child's life. Children might worry about their appearance, tests, being accepted by friends, being

separated from family, as well as many other concerns. Some stress is normal, but too much stress can be unhealthy so it's important to have strategies for coping with it. For example:

- ▶ Talk with a trusted adult
  - ▶ Take deep breaths, count backward, or count spots on the floor
  - ▶ Make a fist and then relax your hand
  - ▶ Play your favorite music and sing along
  - ▶ Write in a journal, draw, or color
  - ▶ Call a friend
  - ▶ Go for a walk, exercise, or dance
  - ▶ Laugh—watch a funny movie, tell jokes, look at cute animal pictures
  - ▶ Play a game
  - ▶ Get enough sleep and eat healthy foods
  - ▶ Have a routine so you know what to expect
  - ▶ Have a plan or schedule for completing a school project or studying for a test
6. Distribute copies of the activity sheet. Part 1 features questions students can ask each other in small groups to encourage them to communicate, share their emotions, and get to know each other. In Part 2, students work in teams to brainstorm a list of ways they might cope with stress or other feelings, and identify trusted adults they can talk with. Invite student volunteers to share their coping strategies.

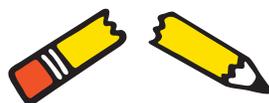
### Activity Two

## Act It Out

In this activity, students role-play situations that may be difficult for kids, to help reinforce how they might use coping strategies and to help build empathy for others.

1. Before starting, ask students how they could help a friend who may be having difficulty managing their feelings—maybe they are very worried, stressed, or sad a lot.
2. Review the tips on the activity sheet as a group.
3. Encourage students to recognize that, just like they should talk to a trusted adult to help themselves feel better, they can also talk with a trusted adult if they are concerned about a friend or want advice on how to help a friend. If a friend says something about hurting themselves, explain to students that they should tell a trusted adult, just as they would if their friend was sick or having an allergic reaction. Emphasize the importance of empathy when helping friends and others who may need support.
4. Distribute the activity sheet and review it with students. In Part 1, students reflect on how they might feel and react in a given situation. In Part 2, students consider how they might respond and help uplift a friend experiencing the situation.
5. For each situation, students should identify a trusted adult they can speak with when they are concerned about how they are feeling, as well as a coping strategy they could implement.
6. Have students work in small groups to discuss and act out the situations. As an alternative, discuss the scenarios as a group.

**Extension Activity:** To complement the *On Our Sleeves* icons, work with the art teacher to create an icon bulletin board on coping strategies. Have each student create two icons—one to represent a stressful feeling and one to represent a corresponding coping strategy. Search “icon collection” at [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org) for examples.



## Teacher Tips & Resources

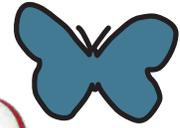
The *On Our Sleeves*® website has resources for educators on mental health topics and wellness. Visit [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org) for tips for working with students with mental illness, information about mental health conditions, where to find help, and more.

To help create a safe and empathetic environment:

- ▶ Encourage ongoing discussion about coping with feelings and remind students to talk to parents and other trusted adults when they need help with their feelings.
- ▶ Be aware of challenges your students may be facing and how best to support their learning.
- ▶ Be aware of signs that a student may have a mental health concern.
- ▶ Communicate with parents and caregivers.
- ▶ Integrate movement breaks into the day to help reduce stress.
- ▶ Create a “joke” time for kids to share jokes and a laugh.
- ▶ Create a wall with images that will help kids smile, like photos of puppies.
- ▶ Compliment students who may be struggling to give them a boost and to let them—and others in the class—know they are valued.

# MY FEELINGS, MY STRATEGIES

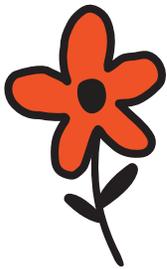
Sometimes it can be difficult to share how we feel or what we are thinking. But people cannot read our minds, so it's important to communicate our feelings, especially if we need help to feel better.



**Part 1:** With your partner or group, take turns asking each other the questions below and answering them to get to know each other.

1. What makes you super happy?
2. What is the scariest thing you can think of?
3. What do you really like to do with your family?
4. Do you have a favorite song? What is it?
5. What is your favorite holiday? What do you like about it?

**Part 2:** Some situations and feelings are easy to cope with, others are not. On the first line of each sentence below, write a feeling such as stressed, worried, sad, or confused. On the second line, write something you can do to make yourself feel better when you're feeling this way. Check out the example.



- ▶ If I feel stressed, I could sing and dance to my favorite song
- ▶ If I feel \_\_\_\_\_, I could \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ If I feel \_\_\_\_\_, I could \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ If I feel \_\_\_\_\_, I could \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ If I feel \_\_\_\_\_, I could \_\_\_\_\_

**Remember!** Talk to a trusted adult about how you're feeling so they can help you. Who are your trusted adults?

## FAMILY NOTE



As a family, talk about the questions above, and then brainstorm your own list of at-home conversation starters. Have each family member write a set of questions and then place them in a paper bag or on a chart. Select a question each day to discuss during a quiet time when you can focus on the conversation, such as dinner, breakfast, on the way to school, or on a family walk.

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# ACT IT OUT

You've been talking about things you can do to help make yourself feel better when you have different emotions. And you've also talked about how to help a friend. Now, act it out! This can help prepare you if you do find yourself in a similar situation.



## Part 1: What would you do if you were in this situation?

For each situation below, answer these three questions. Then act out the situation with your group.

- ▶ How would you feel?
  - ▶ Which trusted adult could you talk to about the situation?
  - ▶ What could you do to help make yourself feel better?
1. You have a big math test coming up. You're nervous about the test.
  2. You're about to join a new soccer team. You're excited, but nervous at the same time.
  3. Your older brother teases you constantly about how you look and dress.
  4. Your mom travels a lot for work, and you miss her.



## TIPS FOR HELPING A FRIEND

- ▶ **Check in.** Let your friends know you are there if they want to talk. Ask questions to learn how you can be helpful. Include them in plans to let them know they aren't alone.
- ▶ **Watch what you say.** If a friend is struggling with bad feelings, don't say mean things or make fun of them. Just reassure them you are there for them.
- ▶ **Talk to someone you trust.** It's ok to feel confused or hurt by things a friend has said or done. Talk to a trusted adult about how you are feeling and how you can talk with your friend.
- ▶ **Just be there.** When a friend is going through changes, the best thing you can do is ask how you can support them.

## Part 2: What could you do if your friend was in this situation?

For each situation below, answer these three questions. Then act out the situation with your group.

- ▶ What might your friend be feeling?
  - ▶ Which trusted adult could you talk to about your friend's situation?
  - ▶ What could you do to help make your friend feel better?
1. Your friend is called names and is pushed by an older student. He is afraid to go to the cafeteria.
  2. Your friend takes medicine to help her feel less anxious. She is worried people will tease her.
  3. You and your friend try out for the school play. You get a role, but your friend does not.
  4. Your friend thinks that his older sister is smoking, and he is worried about her.



## FAMILY NOTE

Talk with your children about the scenarios above. Ask them to share how they would respond. Open the dialogue by letting your children know if you've ever experienced any of these situations or similar ones as a child.

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## DEAR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS.

In school, your child has been learning about mental health and strategies for coping with stress and other feelings through a program that is part of the *On Our Sleeves* movement, created by the curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired (YMI) in cooperation with Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Harlem Globetrotters. The *On Our Sleeves*® movement is a national movement to break the silence and stigma surrounding children's mental health and start important conversations about this topic.

The program emphasizes the importance of kids sharing their feelings and what's on their minds with parents and trusted adults who can help them get to a place where they feel better. It is not uncommon to struggle with emotional or mental health concerns periodically. These strategies can help with managing and reducing symptoms and/or risks. Kids may be reluctant or not know how to speak about what they're feeling inside. But these are important conversations. One in five children is living with a mental illness, but only about half get help. That's why it is important to be on the lookout for early warning signs and learn how to address your child's needs.

### Mental Fitness Activities

As a family, make an effort to stay mentally fit and help alleviate stress—play board games, meditate, go for walks after dinner, do volunteer work, and try the *On Our Sleeves* Mental Fitness Challenge (see link on resource list). Use the time to connect with your children about how they're feeling.

### Start the Conversation

When speaking with your child about mental health and how they're feeling, give them your full attention so they can talk about things they may be having a hard time handling or that are upsetting them. Keep it simple. For example:

- ▶ Ask your child, "What was the best thing about your day?" And then "What was something not so great about your day?"
- ▶ Ask follow-up questions and use feelings words to assess what you think you're hearing, such as, "Sounds like you were mad that Emma did not play with you at recess"; "Sounds like you're upset that you didn't do well on your test."
- ▶ Acknowledge that it's OK to have these feelings and encourage your child to talk about them with you. Consider offering appropriate examples of your own day to reinforce this. It's important in these conversations not to lead a child to believe that certain emotions are "right" or "wrong." Encourage them to talk about their feelings. Don't force the discussion and stop when your child is ready.
- ▶ Talk about how your child might manage these feelings to help them build coping strategies, such as counting, drawing, listening to music, thinking about something fun, etc.

Check out the links on the next page for more information on how to start the conversation.



Learn more about mental illness and *On Our Sleeves* at [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org).

If you or your child need immediate help due to having suicidal thoughts, go to your local emergency room immediately, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or text "START" to 741-741 to reach the Crisis Text Line.

# ON OUR SLEEVES ONLINE TOOLS & RESOURCES

Children and families facing mental illness are not alone. The Nationwide Children's Hospital *On Our Sleeves*® website has information about mental health conditions and behavioral concerns, along with tools that may be helpful if your child is exhibiting these behaviors:

- ▶ Guides on how to talk to kids about mental health, stress, healthy habits and more:  
[OnOurSleeves.org/mental-wellness-tools-guides](https://OnOurSleeves.org/mental-wellness-tools-guides)
- ▶ Videos featuring behavioral health experts:  
[YouTube.com/OnOurSleeves](https://YouTube.com/OnOurSleeves)
- ▶ Locator tool to find children's mental health resources in your state:  
[OnOurSleeves.org/mental-health-resources/national-state-resources](https://OnOurSleeves.org/mental-health-resources/national-state-resources)



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