

Dear Educator,

As you know, the past couple of years have shown us the importance of students' mental health and the impact that it has on their well-being and learning. Unlike physical health, mental health is largely misunderstood and stigmatized in our society. For these reasons, the mental health professionals from On Our Sleeves, powered by Nationwide Children's Hospital, and in partnership with the curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired, are pleased to offer this free program to help you support the mental health of your students.

Through engaging activities, students will identify feelings and emotions, explore coping strategies, and learn about the connection between feelings, empathy, and kindness. These skills and tools can help build a supportive school environment and a culture of positivity and acceptance. In addition, the activities support social and emotional learning skills, as well as health and language arts curricular standards. The program also includes a letter for families that provides suggestions for how to encourage emotional empowerment and empathy at home.

Please share this program with other grades 3-5 teachers at your school. And let us know your opinion of the program by visiting [ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves](https://www.ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves). We look forward to your comments and suggestions.

Sincerely,



Dominic Kinsley, PhD
Editor in Chief
Young Minds Inspired



Questions? Contact YMI toll-free at 1-800-859-8005, or by email at feedback@ymiclassroom.com.

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ON OUR SLEEVES®

The Movement for Children's Mental Health

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BREAKING STIGMAS

TARGET AUDIENCE

Grades 3-5 students, parents, and caregivers

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Help children understand and express emotions, and learn coping strategies
- Encourage children to discuss their thoughts and feelings with trusted adults
- Help build empathy and a culture of positivity and acceptance
- Support self-awareness and active listening skills
- Support health and language skills

HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM

Download, copy, and distribute the three activity sheets to students and share the family letter with parents and caregivers. You can also share the program link with parents so they can do the activities with their children. The activities and letter are available in English and Spanish. Students will need pencils, crayons, or markers to complete the activity sheets. Have students take the completed sheets home to share with their families. Visit [ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves](https://www.ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves) for a standards chart and additional resources.

Before starting: Review your school's policy on mental health concerns before starting this program and know whom to contact for additional support if needed. Also, when discussing feelings, be aware of any trauma students have experienced. If students are hesitant to share, that's okay. Should any student have a concerning response to these activities, accept and validate the student's feelings and ask how you can help. Follow your school's protocol about reaching out to your guidance counselor or crisis resources, and when to inform the child's parent or caregiver.

ACTIVITY 1: WHERE DO FEELINGS COME FROM?

In this activity, students explore emotions and feelings, and the spectrum of intensity each emotion can evoke. To begin, hang a poster-sized paper on the board. Divide the paper into five sections labeled *happy*, *mad*, *sad*, *calm*, and *afraid/nervous*, using a different color for each one.

Explain to students that sometimes we can tell how someone feels by the way they act or what they say. Act out examples and ask students to describe the emotion your action or expression may indicate (or have students act out the emotion): clench your fists and make a mad face to show anger; smile and jump for joy to show happiness; rub your eyes and frown for sadness, etc. Other times it can be difficult to tell how someone feels because they don't say it. And, their actions and expressions may not match how they are feeling.

Remind the students that we all feel strong emotions and feelings sometimes, and that's okay. Point out that when we experience an emotion, it can make us feel many things at once. For example, if you win a game, you probably experience happiness.

Someone who is happy may feel energetic, cheerful, and proud — all at the same time. These feelings are called moods. Sometimes the mood is positive or comfortable — like when you win a prize. Sometimes the mood is uncomfortable like when your after-school plans are canceled, and sometimes the mood is in-between.

Learning to recognize and label our feelings, especially strong feelings, can help us determine what to do to make ourselves feel better.

Direct the students' attention to the chart and ask them to identify whether each word is positive (comfortable), uncomfortable, or in-between. Then, invite students to share examples of situations when someone may feel these emotions. As they share, write synonyms for the words on the chart. Students might share words like angry, scared, shy, nervous, embarrassed, mad, jealous, confused, happy, bored, worried, upset, confident, cheerful, silly, loved, proud, relaxed, tired, energetic, etc. Point out that some words may be used in more than one section.

After they are done sharing, remind students that being aware of feelings and moods is important because it affects our actions. For example, yelling at someone when we feel frustrated or turning our back on a friend when they try to help may cause us to feel worse.

Pass out the activity sheet and review the instructions. If time allows and the students feel safe sharing, have them share their responses with the class.

ACTIVITY 2 : HOW TO HANDLE BIG FEELINGS

In this activity, students brainstorm and share mindfulness techniques and brainstorm activities they enjoy doing to help them build resilience and calming skills.

Ask the students to think back to Activity 1, when they shared situations that made them feel sad, mad, or anxious. Ask: *What could you do to make yourself feel better? What has worked for you or other people?* Remind the students that it's important to respond in a healthy way when we are feeling strong, uncomfortable emotions, and one example is by using mindfulness techniques to relax, focus, and become calm.

Lead the class in this breathing exercise: Breathe in for four counts, hold for four counts, and breathe out for eight counts. This slows your breathing, provides oxygen to your brain, helping you think more clearly, and relaxes the body. Explain this type of breathing exercise takes practice and to do it the best they are able.

Another strategy is to focus on activities they enjoy doing. For example, if they like drawing, then drawing a picture might help them when they are feeling down. Ask the students to brainstorm actions or activities they can turn to when they need help feeling better. They can create their own unique lists. Examples might include physical activity, breathing exercises, listening to music, etc. When they are finished making their lists, invite them to share with the rest of the class if they are comfortable. Consider creating a quiet corner in your classroom with sensory items such as a fidget tool, a soft pillow, dim lighting, books, and other calming

items so that children can implement their strategies when needed.

Pass out the activity sheet and review the directions and coping strategy examples. Invite students to share their answers if they would like to.

ACTIVITY 3 : HELPING FRIENDS FEEL BETTER

Now that the students have explored their own feelings and coping strategies, they will learn about empathy and how to support others.

Ask the students to think about a time someone helped cheer them up. Ask: *Who helped you? How did they help?* As we learned in Activity 2, we can help ourselves with mindfulness techniques when we are feeling down — another way we can feel better is when someone chooses to lend us a helping hand. Explain that one strategy is not better than another. It all depends on the person and what you're comfortable with.

Being kind can help make the school and community a better place. People don't always say how they feel — and it isn't always "written all over their face" — so it can be difficult to know how someone really feels. Therefore, we should always be kind. And being kind doesn't have to be complicated. Often you can do simple things to support someone, such as checking in (asking them how they are feeling), being there to support them with your presence, being mindful of what you say (avoid criticism), and most importantly, talking with a trusted adult if you are concerned about your friend.

Explain that sometimes you can guess that a person needs kindness just from their situation. For example, a person who is new to your school feels nervous and lonely. Many people feel that way in new situations. Ask: *What could you do to help a new student?* Let the students share answers.

Pass out the activity sheet, and review the instructions and support tips. When students are done, invite them to discuss their answers as a class if they are comfortable.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Using the mood chart from Activity 1, assign each mood a number from 1 to 5. Display the chart in the classroom and check in with the students on a daily or weekly basis, asking them how they feel. As students enter the class, ask them to hold up their fingers to identify their mood number. Use their responses to help you decide if you might need to take a break to recharge before starting your lesson.
- Together with your students, write a class promise to be kind to one another. Write the promise on chart paper. Encourage the students to "catch kindness" by sharing when they see another student being kind and write it on a sticky note to post by the promise.
- For a language arts activity, have students write a paragraph, poem, or skit about the importance of kindness.

RESOURCES

- [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org)
- [ymclassroom.com/onoursleeves](https://www.ymclassroom.com/onoursleeves)



WHERE DO FEELINGS COME FROM?

Think about different feelings. Where do they come from? What causes us to feel certain ways? Read the words in each row. Choose one word and write about a situation that might cause someone to feel that way.

1 **HAPPY** **EXCITED** **PLEASED**

Someone can feel _____ when...

2 **SAD** **DISAPPOINTED** **DISCOURAGED**

Someone can feel _____ when...

3 **MAD** **FRUSTRATED** **ANNOYED**

Someone can feel _____ when...

4 **SCARED** **ANXIOUS** **NERVOUS**

Someone can feel _____ when...

5 **CALM** **CONTENT** **SATISFIED**

Someone can feel _____ when...



Encourage your child to express themselves by sharing feelings together. Take time each night to talk about your day. Share how events made you feel and what you did as a result. For example, maybe you accomplished something at work and are proud of it. Sharing your feelings will help your child learn to share theirs. For additional resources, visit OnOurSleeves.org.



HOW TO HANDLE BIG FEELINGS

Part 1. Sometimes when we have big or uncomfortable feelings, we can help ourselves feel better by remembering things we enjoy doing. And doing some of those things again can be a great way to distract ourselves when we need some cheering up. On the lines below, write five things you really enjoy doing that make you feel calm or happy.

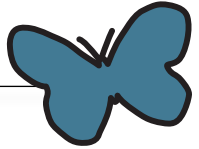
1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____



Part 2. Now, choose one of your activities and describe why you enjoy it.

COPING TIPS

Cut out this list and keep it handy at home or in a notebook.

- Talk with a trusted adult.
- Do a physical activity or go for a walk.
- Get a good night's sleep.
- Spend time with family.
- Spend time with friends.
- Draw or build something.
- Eat healthy.
- Listen to music.



What does everyone in your family like to do? Make a list together and take turns choosing a family activity. After the activity, talk about how you're feeling. For additional resources, visit [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org).

HELPING FRIENDS FEEL BETTER

Part 1. Sometimes our friends can have big or uncomfortable feelings and may not know what to do. They may need support or some extra care when this happens. Read the scenarios below. Think about how the person may be feeling, how they could manage their feelings, and what you, as a friend, might be able to do to help.

1. Paris is playing in her first basketball game tomorrow. Her family and friends are going to watch.

- How do you think Paris feels? _____
- How can she manage her feelings? _____

- What could you do? _____

2. Emeka made a silly mistake on his math test and did not get a good grade.

- How do you think Emeka feels? _____
- How can he manage his feelings? _____

- What could you do? _____



Part 2. Create a positive picture! On the back of this sheet or separate paper, draw a picture of something that sparks kindness for you. Then, write a slogan to go with it, such as “Use your mind! Be kind!” Or include words and phrases that create feelings of positive energy.



TIPS TO HELP A FRIEND DEALING WITH BIG FEELINGS

Cut out this list and keep it handy at home or in a notebook.

- Check in (ask them how they are feeling).
- Listen and be there to support them.
- Be mindful of what you say to them.
- Do something with them like listen to music, play a game, or go for a walk.
- Talk with a trusted adult if you are concerned about your friend.



Your child's class is talking about ways we can be kind to each other. Consider having your own “kindness day” where your family performs an act of kindness, such as donating to a food bank, volunteering to help clean up a park, or planting flowers for an elderly neighbor. For additional resources, visit OnOurSleeves.org/kindness.

BREAKING STIGMAS



Dear Parents and Caregivers,

The **On Our Sleeves**[®] movement, powered by the behavioral health experts at Nationwide Children's Hospital, aims to break the stigmas surrounding children's mental health and educate families and advocates. To support families and schools, **On Our Sleeves** has teamed up with the curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired to provide your child's teacher with classroom resources that support students' well-being. **On Our Sleeves** is based on the idea that kids don't "wear their thoughts" on their sleeves, so we don't know what they are going through. That's why we must give them a voice.

Helping your child identify and manage their emotions is an ongoing process, but a vital one. When we talk openly about emotions and moods, we empower our children with the tools to self-manage their mental wellness. The tips below can help you support your child's emotional and mental well-being — and your family's as well.

- **Check-in with your child:** Make it a daily habit to ask how they are feeling. Instead of only asking about school, ask about their emotions as well. Did anything happen that made them feel joyful? Sad? Daily check-ins create the habit of talking so that when a difficult conversation comes up, everyone feels more ready to talk.
- **Model talking about your emotions:** Freely talk about your own feelings, whether you are happy, sad, frustrated, or even angry. The more you normalize conversations about emotions, the easier it will be for your child to share with you when they are feeling overwhelmed.
- **Share coping strategies:** Explain how you cope when you are feeling strong emotions, then ask your child if they would like help managing their own. If listening to music, spending time with friends, reading, or physical activity works for you, it might work for them, too.
- **Create a calm corner:** Sometimes our homes can be too loud and stimulating for a child who is feeling overwhelmed. Sometimes we just need a break to calm down. Designate a quiet space where your child can cozy up with a blanket or soft pillow. Fill a box with their favorite distraction or relaxation items and place it in the space, for example — coloring sheets and colored pencils, a puzzle, the child's journal, or some of their favorite books.
- **Identify other trusted adults:** With your child, discuss and make a list of other trusted adults in their lives who they can talk with if you are not available and they are not feeling okay.

Remind your child that it's okay not to feel okay, but it's important to talk about it and ask for help when they experience strong emotions or feel overwhelmed. Starting these conversations with your child at an early age makes it easier as they grow older.

Sincerely,

Ariana Hoet, PhD

Clinical Director, *On Our Sleeves*

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