

## 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.

Children can have difficulty expressing their emotions, and middle schoolers can be hesitant to talk about how they feel or ask for help. The activities in this program focus on helping students identify and express emotions, explore coping strategies, and foster empathy and kindness to help build a supportive school environment and a culture of positivity and acceptance — a place where students can freely share with their peers and adults. In addition, the engaging lessons support social and emotional learning skills, as well as national health and language arts curricular standards. Included in the program is a letter to families that provides suggestions for extending the learning by encouraging emotional empowerment and empathy at home.

Please share this program with other teachers at your school. And let us know your opinion of the program by visiting [ymiclassroom.com/feedback-onoursleeves](https://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](mailto:feedback@ymiclassroom.com).

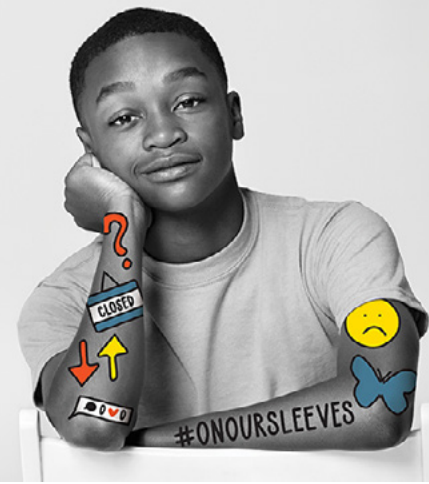
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## ON OUR SLEEVES®

The Movement for Children's Mental Health

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# BREAKING STIGMAS



### TARGET AUDIENCE

Grades 6-8 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 to complete the activity sheets. Have students take the completed sheets home to share with their families. Visit [ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves](https://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: MEET YOUR FEELINGS

In this activity, students explore emotions and feelings, and the spectrum of intensity they can evoke.

To start, ask the students to imagine this scenario: *You have spent a lot of time and put a lot of effort into practicing for a competition such as a playoff game, dance competition, or another event. On the big day, you get sick and are unable to compete. How would you feel?* Allow students to share their answers.

Tell the students to imagine that someone told you to "get over it," because "it's no big deal." Ask: *How would this make you feel?* It would likely make you more frustrated. Emphasize that it's okay to have strong feelings or emotions. It's okay to feel mad or disappointed or not feel okay.

We all have strong feelings at times. But it's important to recognize these feelings and learn what we can do to help ourselves feel better — this includes asking someone for help.

Take a quick poll using a selection of feelings from the three columns featured on the activity sheet. Have students put their heads down and ask for a show of hands or a thumbs up if students have experienced the feeling or emotion. Remind students to share only if they feel comfortable doing so. Point out to students the commonalities. Then pass out the activity sheets and review the instructions. Once students are done, invite them to share their personal experiences only if they feel comfortable. Encourage others to comment if they can relate. This will reinforce the concept that we all experience strong feelings and it's okay not to feel okay.

## ACTIVITY 2: MANAGING STRONG FEELINGS

In this activity, students learn that self-care is important for managing or coping with strong, uncomfortable feelings in a healthy way. Explain that sometimes we might be more critical of ourselves than we are of others. This can be hard on our self-esteem and emotional well-being. This is especially true when we are dealing with strong emotions.

As an example, ask the students to think about how they would respond to a friend who did not accomplish something that they really tried for, such as making a team, doing well on a test, etc. Ask: *Would you be kind, supportive, encouraging?*

Then, have them think about how they would treat themselves in the same situation. Ask: *Would you be as understanding and kind to yourself as you would be to a friend?* Have the students turn to a peer and discuss. Then, ask for volunteers to share with the whole class. Explain that sometimes, it's hard to treat ourselves with the kindness we deserve. But self-care is important for our well-being.

Pass out the activity sheet and review the instructions. Invite students to share their responses if they are comfortable.

## ACTIVITY 3: HOW CAN I HELP?

In this activity, students will turn their attention to supporting others. Ask: *What are some things you can do to help a friend who is feeling down?* Place the students into small groups or peer partners and have them create a list of ways to help a friend who is struggling with strong emotions. When they are done, ask the groups to share, and write the answers on the board.

If the students do not include the following ideas, add them yourself: Checking in with your friends, spending time with them, talking with a trusted adult if you are worried about your friend, and being mindful of what you say (avoid criticism). Being inclusive is also a way to be supportive, and it can go a long way in helping others.

Remind students that we don't always know how others are feeling or what they are going through, so expressing kindness is a positive practice that can be helpful.

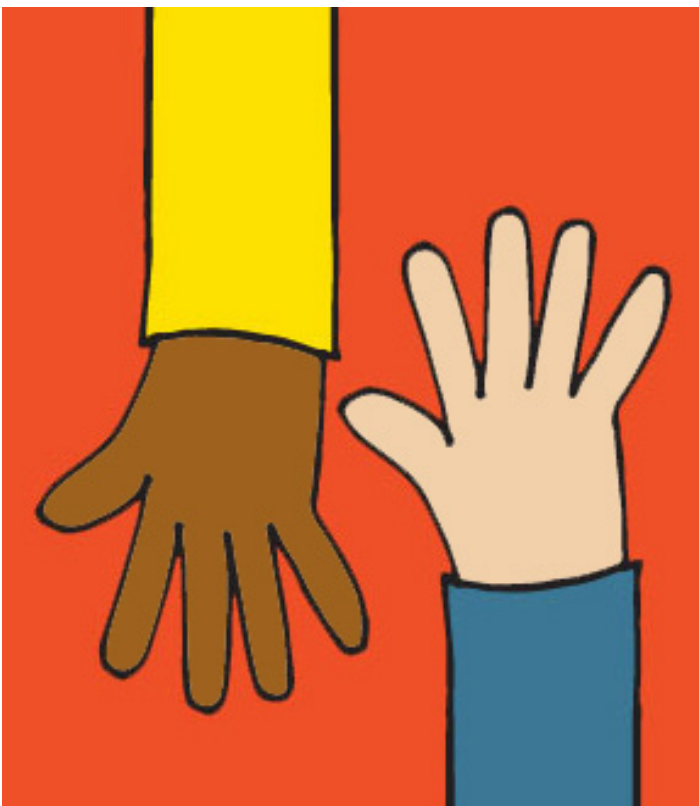
Expressing kindness can help. Pass out the activity sheet and review the instructions. Leave the ideas for helping a friend on the board. Students can use them while completing the sheet. When the students are done, have them share their answers. Next, have students design posters about the importance of kindness and display them on a bulletin board for the whole classroom or school to see.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Check in with students regularly about how they are feeling. Try a “high/low” share once a week where students share their “highs” and “lows” of the week. If they're interested, they can share how they have coped with their low. Or, set time aside to do a “mindfulness minute” where you lead the students in some breathing and/or imaging techniques.
- Have students work in small groups to brainstorm coping strategies to share, or to create and perform a skit or design a poster highlighting the importance of self-care and demonstrating at least one method of self-care, a coping strategy, or how to support empathy.

## RESOURCES

- [OnOurSleeves.org](http://OnOurSleeves.org)
- [ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves](http://ymiclassroom.com/onoursleeves)



# MEET YOUR FEELINGS

The adjectives in the chart below describe positive, uncomfortable, and in-between feelings. Check off all the feelings you have felt recently. Then choose four of your feelings and fill in the blanks below to describe the situation that prompted each one.

POSITIVE	UNCOMFORTABLE	IN-BETWEEN / NEUTRAL
<input type="checkbox"/> happy	<input type="checkbox"/> lonely	<input type="checkbox"/> relaxed
<input type="checkbox"/> confident	<input type="checkbox"/> frustrated	<input type="checkbox"/> calm
<input type="checkbox"/> loved	<input type="checkbox"/> nervous	<input type="checkbox"/> peaceful
<input type="checkbox"/> cheerful	<input type="checkbox"/> embarrassed	<input type="checkbox"/> sleepy
<input type="checkbox"/> silly	<input type="checkbox"/> mad	<input type="checkbox"/> serene
<input type="checkbox"/> proud	<input type="checkbox"/> confused	<input type="checkbox"/> bored
<input type="checkbox"/> joyful	<input type="checkbox"/> afraid	<input type="checkbox"/> quiet
<input type="checkbox"/> excited	<input type="checkbox"/> angry	<input type="checkbox"/> satisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> optimistic	<input type="checkbox"/> sad	
<input type="checkbox"/> grateful	<input type="checkbox"/> worried	
<input type="checkbox"/> amused	<input type="checkbox"/> upset	
<input type="checkbox"/> hopeful	<input type="checkbox"/> anxious	



Encourage your child to express themselves by sharing feelings together. Let them see that grown-ups also experience different feelings. Take time each night to talk about your day. Share how events made you feel and what you did as a result. Sharing your feelings will help your child learn to share theirs. For additional resources, visit [OnOurSleeves.org](http://OnOurSleeves.org).

- 1. FEELING:** \_\_\_\_\_

**THE SITUATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_
- 2. FEELING:** \_\_\_\_\_

**THE SITUATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_
- 3. FEELING:** \_\_\_\_\_

**THE SITUATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_
- 4. FEELING:** \_\_\_\_\_

**THE SITUATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# MANAGING STRONG FEELINGS

**Part 1.** It's important to practice self-care; especially when we are dealing with something difficult that creates strong or uncomfortable feelings and moods. Look at the self-care tips below and choose two that you think would be most helpful to you when you are experiencing strong feelings. Or write your own self-care idea. Then, on the back of this sheet, write about how you can use those methods to help yourself feel better.

## THESE ARE SOME WAYS TO HELP YOU MANAGE STRONG FEELINGS:

- Talk with a trusted grown-up.
- Make time to enjoy your favorite hobby.
- Get at least 8 hours of sleep each night.
- Talk with a close friend about your true feelings.
- Spend some time playing with a pet.
- Listen to your favorite music.
- Create some art.
- Get outside for a walk or a bike ride.
- Learn more about something you are interested in by joining a club or taking a class.
- Write your own: \_\_\_\_\_



**Part 2.** Part of managing strong feelings is how we treat ourselves during these times. Think about it. Read each question below. Write your answers on the back of this sheet or on separate paper.

1. Think about a time when a close friend went through a challenging time with strong feelings. How did you respond to your friend?
2. Now think about times when you have struggled with a strong emotion. How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations?
3. Did you notice a difference? If so, ask yourself why.
4. How might things change if you treat yourself like a close friend when you're feeling bad? Why not try it and see what happens?

## FAMILIES

Talk with your child about coping strategies you use when dealing with strong or difficult emotions. And brainstorm ideas that your child could try. For additional resources, visit [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.onoursleeves.org).

# HOW CAN I HELP?

Your friends and people around you also experience strong or uncomfortable feelings from time to time. How are you supportive of them? Read each scenario below. How do you think each person feels? What might help them to manage their strong feelings? How could you help or show *empathy* — that means putting yourself in someone else’s shoes to understand how they are feeling? Choose one scenario and use the back of this sheet to write about how you could help that person cope with their uncomfortable feelings.

1. Griffin is about to start a new school. He won’t know anyone there. He can’t sleep at night thinking about it.
2. Piper’s parents are getting a divorce. They love her and she knows that their divorce has nothing to do with her. But every time she thinks about it, her stomach starts to hurt. Sometimes she does not even want to go home.
3. Carl has been playing baseball since 4<sup>th</sup> grade, but he doesn’t enjoy it anymore. His father wants him to try out for the baseball team when he starts high school next year, but Carl wants to try something new. He doesn’t know what to do.
4. Jessie receives a text with an embarrassing picture and a lie about her. The text has been sent to the whole class.
5. Jax’s sister has been sick for a while and is going into the hospital for surgery. His parents are concerned. He is concerned about his sister and his parents. He knows that they will be spending a lot of time at the hospital.



## FAMILIES

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](https://OnOurSleeves.org/kindness).



## TIPS FOR BEING A SUPPORTIVE FRIEND

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

- Listen and let them know you’re there for them.
- Suggest your friend speak to a trusted adult.
- Engage your friend — suggest an activity.
- Suggest a walk.
- Listen to music or watch a fun show on TV.
- Speak with a trusted adult about your friend if you’re concerned.

Add your own ideas.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



# BREAKING STIGMAS



## Dear Parents and Caregivers,

The **On Our Sleeves**<sup>®</sup> 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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