

## 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 supporting discussions about feelings and emotions at home.

Please share this program with other grades K-2 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 K-2 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://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: ALL ABOUT FEELINGS

In this activity, students learn to label and normalize emotions, feelings, and moods. To start, create a chart on large paper or your board with five sections labeled *happy*, *mad*, *sad*, *calm*, and *afraid*. Use a different color for each emotion. Have the children help choose the colors. Act out an emotion and then ask students to guess which emotion you are showing. For example, smile and jump for joy to show happiness; rub your eyes and frown for sadness, etc. Then have students act out emotions.

Next, remind the students that we all feel these emotions sometimes, and that's okay. Point out that when we experience an emotion, it can make us feel many things. For example, if you win a race, you could experience happiness. Someone who is happy may feel excited 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 you lose your favorite toy, and sometimes the mood is in-between, but we all feel all these moods. Learning to recognize our feelings, especially strong ones, can help us decide what to do to make ourselves feel better.

Ask students to review the chart and identify positive moods, uncomfortable moods, and in-between moods. Then, invite them to share examples when someone may feel these emotions. Do not volunteer anyone to share who is not comfortable. Write synonyms for the words they share on the chart. For example: angry, scared, shy, nervous, embarrassed, mad, confused, jealous, happy, bored, worried, upset, confident, cheerful, silly, loved, proud, relaxed, tired, energetic, etc. (Keep the “mood” chart for the following activities and as a classroom tool.)

Pass out the activity sheet and go over the instructions. Have students draw pictures for each feeling and write a description. Calm may be difficult for students to envision. Suggest that they think of a quiet time. If time allows and the students feel comfortable, have them share their drawings and descriptions.

### ACTIVITY 2: HOW TO HANDLE BIG FEELINGS

In this activity, students will continue to practice identifying moods and learn how to manage big emotions and feelings with mindfulness techniques. Display the “mood chart” as a visual aid.

Tell the students that they will identify feelings and emotions for different situations. Assign a color and mood from the chart to an area on the perimeter of the room. Read the following situations to the students and ask them to go to the area of the room that reflects how the situation would make them feel. Explain there is no right or wrong answer, and that one situation can make one person feel one way and another person feel a different way, such as happy and nervous. You can also feel more than one feeling at the same time. If you feel more than one feeling, stand in the middle between the feelings.

1. You were chosen to be the line leader today.
2. A student grabs the book you were going to read right out of your hands.
3. The classroom is quiet as everyone paints a picture.
4. It’s your day for show-and-tell.
5. You hear and see a thunderstorm that lasts a while.

Once done, remind students that we all feel a lot of feelings and emotions and that’s okay. Sometimes, we need help to make us feel better. For example, a deep breath can help us calm down and think more clearly. Ask the students sit up straight and then lead them in a breathing exercise: Breath in for four counts, hold their breath for four counts, and exhale for eight counts.

As a class, brainstorm strategies students can use to help them feel better and manage their emotions. Ideas might include asking a grown-up for help, coloring, using a fidget tool or other sensory items, trying breathing techniques, engaging in a physical activity such as playing outside or going for a walk, talking with a friend, listening to music, or finding a quiet space to be alone. Emphasize to students the importance of talking to a trusted grown-up when they have big feelings. Create 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 they can implement some of these strategies.

Pass out the activity sheet and review the directions and coping strategies. Have students complete the page and talk about strategies that they would like to try.

### ACTIVITY 3: HELPING FRIENDS FEEL BETTER

This activity focuses on empathy and how to support others who may be experiencing big feelings.

Ask a student to act out a situation with you. Tell the student to ask you how you are feeling. When they ask you, frown, look at the ground, shrug your shoulders, and mutter “fine.” Then, ask the class: *Does it really look like you are “fine”?* Explain that people don’t always say how they feel, so it can be difficult to know how someone is really feeling. Therefore, we should always be kind and supportive. As an alternative, demonstrate frustration by trying to tie your shoe or build a block tower unsuccessfully.

Ask the students to brainstorm how the student could respond to you: *What should the student do now? Should they walk away? Is there something else they can do?* Let students volunteer ways they can help you, playing the person who is “fine.” For example, the student might ask if something is wrong, if you had a bad morning, if you are hurt, or if you need help with something.

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

Pass out the activity sheet and read the directions and sentences with the class. Once done, invite those who are comfortable to share how they could help a friend.

**Answers:** Suggested responses: 1. sad; 2. afraid; 3. calm; 4. happy; 5. mad. Sentences will vary.

### EXTENSIONS

- Display the mood chart and use it during sharing times to help students express how they feel.
- With your students, write a class promise to be kind to one another. Encourage the students to “catch kindness” by sharing when they see another student being kind, and then do the same for someone else.

### RESOURCES

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





# ALL ABOUT FEELINGS

Think about different feelings. Read the feeling words in the boxes. Then, draw a picture of something that might make someone feel that way. Write a word or sentence about your picture on the line.

**HAPPY**

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**MAD**

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**SAD**

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**CALM**

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**FAMILIES**

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



# HOW TO HANDLE BIG FEELINGS

Make a poster to help you with big feelings. Draw a picture of yourself in the square and write your name. Then, read your poster with a grown-up or friend.

Sometimes, I have big feelings.  
I can do things to help myself!

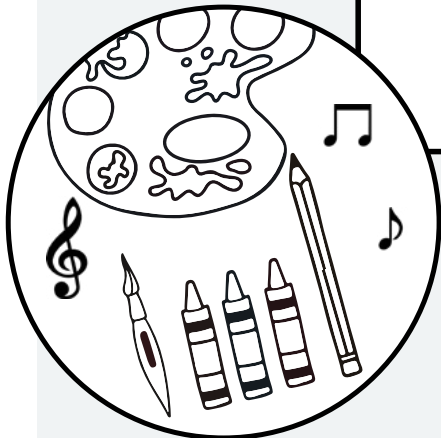


I can talk with a grown-up.

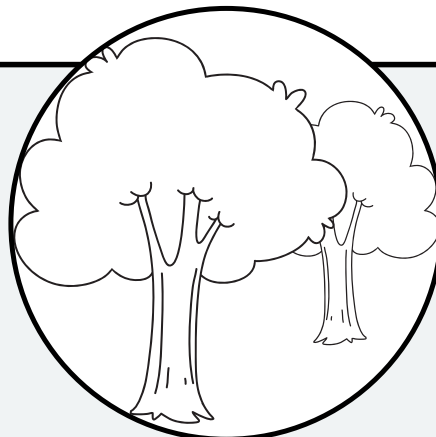


I can take deep breaths.

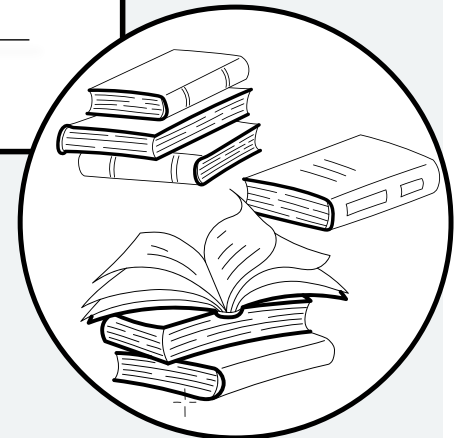
\_\_\_\_\_ MY NAME



I can do art or listen to music.



I can go for a walk.



I can read or sit quietly.



Today your child created this mini poster with coping strategies for when they have big feelings. Read the poster together and talk about strategies that will work best for your child when they feel strong emotions. For additional resources, visit [OnOurSleeves.org](https://www.OnOurSleeves.org).

# HELPING FRIENDS FEEL BETTER

**Part 1.** When our friends have big feelings, we can help them! Read each sentence. How might the person be feeling? Draw a line from the sentence to the feeling picture.



1. Brian's dog is sick.



happy

2. Emma has to go to the dentist.



sad

3. Amir is reading under a tree.



mad

4. Ezra is going on a surprise trip with his family.



calm

5. Ryan was pushed by another child at recess.



afraid

**Part 2.** How can you help support these friends? Choose one or two children. Then write what you could do to help them. On the back of this sheet, draw a picture to show how you will help them.

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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://www.onoursleeves.org/kindness).



# 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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