

Engagement Guide

ScreenagersMovie.com

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Using this Guide



The Engagement Guide for **Screenagers NEXT CHAPTER** is a tool to support schools, administrators, parents, community organizations, and teens using the film as a jumping off point to discuss and learn more about the mental wellbeing of teens coming of age in the digital age. Specifically, the engagement guide addresses the upsurge of stress, anxiety and depression among teens today and what research-based prosocial interventions are proving to be effective.

The guide is split into three major sections:

KEY CONCEPTS FOR MODERATORS AND EDUCATORS

offers brief background pieces that reinforce the central topics in the film.

DISCUSSION IDEAS FOR MODERATORS offers a collection of recommended questions and suggested answers to enrich your post-screening school and community conversation.

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES FOR EDUCATORS includes resources for educators to incorporate the ideas introduced in the film to support mental wellbeing and strengthen resilience in their classrooms, schools, and homes.

Stress, Anxiety and Depression in Teens



STRESS

Stress is a complicated and dynamic physical and emotional response a person may have as they interact with their circumstances. It is a subjective experience - what feels stressful on one day may feel easy the next, and what is stressful to one person might not be to another. Furthermore, some amount of stress can be useful and increase productivity, where too much stress can be debilitating. Because of all these factors, identifying, measuring and treating stress can be challenging, but it is important to know that it is possible and necessary to learn how to manage stress.

"We know that adolescents experience greater stress... they give us higher ratings of stress when they're asked, and also when we measure their level of cortisol, which is a stress hormone, they have higher levels of cortisol as compared to adults."

ADRIANA GALVAN, PHD
Adolescent Brain Researcher UCLA



Some stress can be related to using social media:

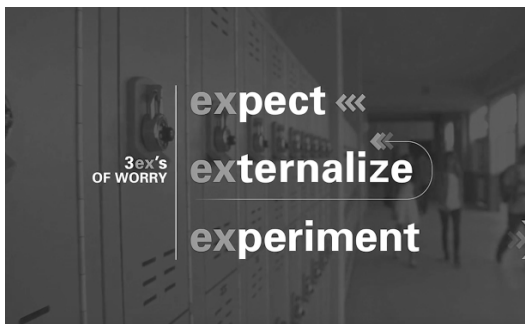
"It's stressful to post something."

"Like what time is the right time to post it."

"If you post something, someone comments something mean or rude on it."

"Oh, I'm not as skinny as her, I can't afford to go on that trip. I see people doing fun things and then my anxiety just kind of takes over."

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS FOR STRESS: Consistent sleep, Building Social and Emotional skills, Communication skills, Author Lynn Lyons' Three Exes of Worry: Expect, Externalize and Experiment.



ANXIETY

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by tension and worried thoughts, and accompanied by physical responses like increased heart rate, sweating or upset stomach. Anxiety disorders happen when those thoughts and responses are recurrent and disrupt daily life.

"Anxiety involves a problem with fear. Feeling afraid about something that's right in front of you or worrying about that thing that might happen. If my anxiety interferes with my ability to do things, we call that avoidance. That's the easiest way to recognize that your anxiety has become a clinical problem."

DANIEL PINE, MD
Chief Research Psychiatrist
National Institute of Mental Health

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS: Consistent Sleep, Exposure Therapy, Mindfulness. Medication at Times.

DEPRESSION

Depression is marked by persistent feelings of sadness and loss of interest in things that used to be of interest. How much these interfere with daily functioning help determine the severity of the situation. There are many other characteristics such as feelings of low self-worth, changes in appetite, and fatigue. Depression is a serious medical issue, but one that is treatable.

“There's a difference between depression and feeling sad, you know, it's when you're feeling sad or irritable most of the day, every day - you're having difficulty sleeping, you're having a hard time concentrating. It's a compilation of all of those things”

ELIZABETH MAZZA, PHD
Psychologist

“It's concerning to learn that since 2011, there's been a 59 percent increase in teens reporting depressive symptoms.”

DELANEY RUSTON, MD

Some studies have found that teens that spend over two hours a day of social media are more likely to report depressive symptoms than those who use it less. We cannot tell from the data if social media is the cause of low feelings or if teens with low feelings go to screen time more to do things such as distract themselves. Data does tell us is that young people who are in a low emotional state are at greater risk of having negative feelings while on social media.

“There is a blunting of the response to positive stimuli in depression, so people who have depression, their brains do not respond as vigorously to positive things.”

DANIEL PINE, MD
Chief Research Psychiatrist
National Institute of Mental Health

TREATMENTS: Therapy, Behavioral Activation, Connection, Family Relationships, Medication at times, and others.



Sleep, Brain Development and Mental Wellbeing



SLEEP

“As sleep gets eroded, and sleep deprivation gets worse... and then they get down on themselves, it becomes part of a bigger spiral. A big factor is with electronic devices in the bedroom--about screen time negatively impacting sleep... That amplifies the spiral.”

RON DAHL, MD

**Pediatrician & Developmental Scientist
Center For The Developing Adolescent**

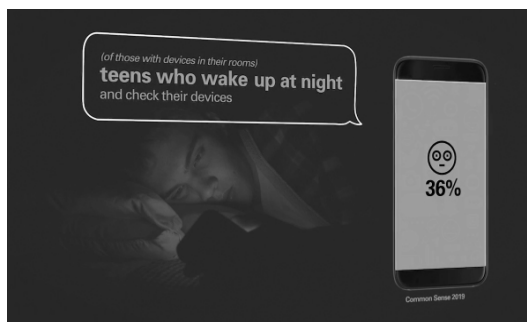
The American Academy of Sleep Medicine has recommended that children aged 6–12 years should regularly sleep 9–12 hours a night and teenagers aged 13–18 years should sleep 8–10 hours a night.

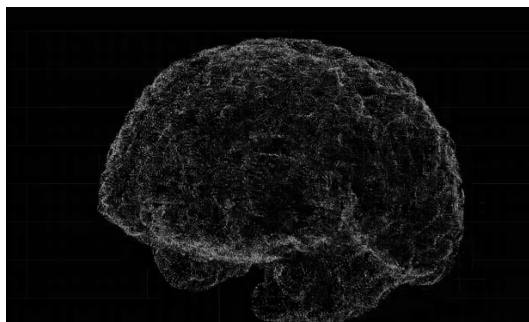
“Of those with devices in their rooms, 36 percent of teens wake up to check their devices.”

Common Sense Media, 2019

“Sometimes a sleep deprived teenager will appear just like they have anxiety, clinical anxiety, clinical depression and it's sleep.”

LESLIE WALKER-HARDING, MD
**Chair UW School of Medicine, Pediatrics
Seattle Children's Hospital**





BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

“Unlike in the first dozen years of life, when the brain is accumulating more and more connections, once we get to the teen years, the brain begins to cut away the connections that it established earlier on. And that’s called pruning. The pruning is followed by increased linkages among those neurons that have remained. The brain is remodeling itself and it’s a kind of ‘use it or lose it’ principle.”

DAN SIEGEL, MD
Psychology Professor, UCLA

“During adolescence, something really interesting happens with the brain in response to the same emotional stimulus. The teenage brain is on high alert and so this translates into behavior that may be more emotionally reactive. . . .”

“The amygdala is actually a relatively small nugget in the brain that responds to anything that may be emotional and in adolescence we’re struggling with anxiety so the amygdala becomes more active more so than it does in kids who aren’t suffering from anxiety.”

ADRIANA GALVAN, PHD
Adolescent Brain Researcher, UCLA

Discussion Ideas for Moderators



TIPS FOR LEADING A GREAT DISCUSSION

BE PREPARED: Read this guide and the resources at ScreenagersMovie.com, and watch the film before your event to become familiar with the topics to help plan your goals for the event. There is rarely enough time during a screening event to cover all you want, so make sure your audience knows about the website to encourage further learning.

SET THE TONE: Share why you think the film is important and what you hope your school or community group will gain from it. Your passion and interest will set the tone for the dialogue that follows.

INVITE FULL GROUP PARTICIPATION: Acknowledge and welcome young people in the audience. Offer an explicit invitation for participation to them so they know their input is as important as that of the adults in the room.

ENCOURAGE CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE: As you ask the suggested discussion questions or develop your own, remind your group to follow broad guidelines of dialogue, like being aware of how much “airtime” each person is taking, allowing others to finish their thoughts before speaking, and listening with the intent to understand, rather than to convince.

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION

“Welcome to our screening of *Screenagers NEXT CHAPTER*. I’m looking forward to watching the film with you and discussing both the mental health challenges facing teens today and mental wellbeing. The film is about an hour long. After watching, we have about XX minutes for discussion. I hope it will be the beginning of a longer conversation about how our community can support all of our students to thrive and grow. To those students and young people watching with us, your voices are of particular importance as we all work together to support mental well-being.”

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION

You may want to open the discussion with a few general questions to get the conversation started:

- Was there a moment or a character that stood out to you in particular?
- What did you learn that was new or different?
- What issue do you find most troubling? Why?
- Be sure to sign up for Dr. Ruston’s free weekly blog called Tech Talk Tuesdays. You can go to screenagersmovie.com

REFERENCE POINTS AND ANSWERS: The following are common questions that you may want to pose or may come up in your discussion, and some information to help you respond.

1. STRESS, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION AMONG TEENS

Q: We learned in the film that since 2011 there has been a 59% increase in teens reporting depressive symptoms, what are your reactions to that? Could it be in part that people are more open about saying they have those feelings on a survey? How much do you think screen time plays a role. Why or why not?

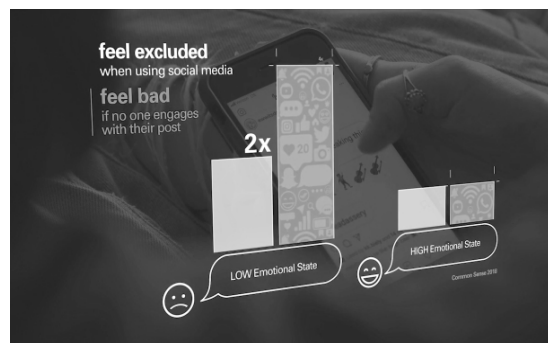
IF YOU WANT TO HAVE A COUPLE OF STATS TO HAVE ON HAND, THESE CAN BE HELPFUL:

- By age 18, 13% of teens will have met criteria, on a survey, for a Depressive Episode
- By age 18, 8% of teens will have met criteria for an Anxiety condition that has significantly impacted their life (most commonly it is social anxiety)

Q: What are your thoughts about the relationship between stress, anxiety and depression, and how much time teens spend on their screens and using social media?

MODERATOR REFERENCE POINTS

- It’s complicated. As we saw in the film, screens can evoke negative emotions like comparing self to others, fear of disapproval or missing out, or interrupted sleep. Screens can also provide support, like connection to good friends, good advice, laughter, and instruction. It is clear that many teens who are in a low emotional state often go to screens as a way of hiding from or distracting from uncomfortable feelings and thoughts.
- There is a correlation between spending more time on screens, in particular social media, and stress, anxiety, and depression - which means they are related, but we have more to learn about precisely how they are related. Regardless, setting boundaries and focusing on using screens in positive ways is likely to help improve mental wellbeing.
- Research studies clearly demonstrate that those teens who already have mental health challenges, like anxiety and depression, are at a higher risk for some of the known side effects of frequent social media use, like feeling excluded and feeling bad about themselves.



- “What I worry about the most is the young people who say, when I’m feeling depressed or stressed or anxious, using social media makes me feel worse, but I do it anyway. I can’t stop.”

VICKY RIDEOUT
Researcher

Q: What factors other than time on screens affect your teen's mental health?

MODERATOR REFERENCE POINTS

- While it is clear that the use of screens is one factor in how a teen's mood may modulate, there are many others, including stressors at home and school. Additionally, the brain development happening during adolescence increases their emotional highs and lows.
- Making sure teens have enough sleep every night can be one of the most effective steps in supporting your child's mental wellness. Remember, The American Academy of Sleep Medicine has recommended that children aged 6–12 years should regularly sleep 9–12 hours a night and teenagers aged 13–18 years should sleep 8–10 hours a night.

Q: When should I become concerned about my teen's anxiety or depression?

- Everyone goes through challenging times and moments in life. When a young person's symptoms, like sadness, anxiety, or worry, last over time or begin to interfere with their ability to function in daily life, they may be in need of more formal kinds of support.
- If a young person in your life is in crisis, or expressing thoughts of self-harm or suicide, you can find support urgently through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-8255. Many young people and adults have used the app CRISIS TEXT LINE for support for mental health challenges of all magnitudes. The people who respond to the texts have had 30 hours of extensive training. People text 741741 (the services is free).



2. MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS AMONG TEENS

Q: What barriers exist for teens to discuss mental health issues?

- Stigma against mental health issues is a major barrier to talking about them and getting much-needed support and treatment. Young people struggling with mental health need support and validation for what they are going through, and skills to cope in healthy ways. Severe mental health issues like anxiety and depression can have serious and long-term side effects, and they require professional treatment.
- “What if so much of what we call ‘stigma’ around mental health problems is actually unease and fear around talking with someone going through emotional challenges? What if we promoted a lot more practice in these and other authentic conversations early on?” - Delaney Ruston
- Stress, anxiety, and depression are real and potentially debilitating mental health issues - nobody can “just get over them.” As we saw in the film, suppressing emotions is harmful, and actually weakens a person's ability to absorb information. And, anxiety and depression can lead to serious issues like self-harm, or suicidal thoughts and actions. It is important to access effective treatment to help young people navigate these challenges.
- “That's when I started seeing school counselors and they started to try to help me. I would tell them my problems and my thoughts and they would tell me that I'm a good person. Just talking about it, yeah, like it just got like a lot out.” - Ishmael, Student

Q: How is gender and gender identity related to mental health?

MODERATOR REFERENCE POINTS

- Gender may influence how young people perceive the expression of emotion. The mental health and resilience strategies in this film benefit both boys and girls.

“I feel like I have to be tough all the time when I talk about my emotions and not cry and stuff. Then I feel like I'm not being strong.”

DANA



3. SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES

Q: What are ways to support my teen's mental wellbeing?

Many suggestions and interventions were mentioned in the film.

VALIDATE MORE, PROBLEM SOLVE LESS

"If I had to pick one skill for parents to get better at, to be effective with their teenagers, it would be validation. It's not approval, it's not agreement. It's seeing it from their perspective and accepting their feelings exactly the way they are without trying to mess with them."

LAURA KASTNER
Author, *Wise Minded Parenting*

"As parents, the hardest thing in the world is just to sit on your hands but by grabbing more control to try and solve the situation, it lowers

my stress, but it increases my kid's stress because I've just taken the control away from him. But if I say, 'is there anything I can do to help you?' He starts thinking—it starts all this activation of the decision prep, problem solving part of your brain—he starts thinking, thinking, thinking, and that's training his brain. So then in another situation that's stressful, I'm not there, Mom's not there - his brain can start thinking, what can I do to help myself?"

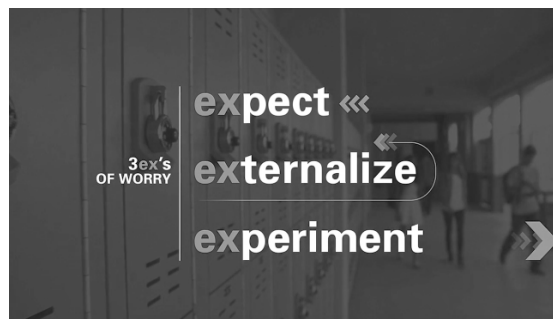
NED JOHNSON
Author, *The Self Driven Child*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How do you understand the difference between validation and problem solving?
- When Ned Johnson says that "As parents, the hardest thing in the world is just to sit on your hands," does that resonate for you? Why or why not?
- Think of a challenge your teen has faced or is currently facing. What are ways you can validate their experience?

THE THREE EX'S OF WORRY

Author Lynn Lyons's "Three Ex's of Worry" is one strategy that can help young people more effectively respond to feelings of worry. It takes practice. As an adult, modeling it to your kid your own use of the skill is a great idea.



Expect worry to show up - Oh, there it is. So I'm about to take a test or online in bed at night, or I hear somebody else got into this school. You have to recognize that that's your worry...

Externalize it. So I'm going to pull it out. I'm going to give it a name. I'm going to personify it. So Hi Pete, nice to see you...

Experiment: We're going to do the opposite of what the worry is demanding. It demands attention, but I'm not going to get into discussion with it. Instead I'm going to pivot into getting started on my homework. If I'm going to sleep, I might pivot into thinking about something that's sort of mundane enough that doesn't really matter to me. "

LYNN LYONS
Psychologist

DISCUSSION IDEA:

- Ask for suggestions of common worries among the group, and practice using the Three Ex's in the way author Lynn Lyons suggests.

SHARE AND PRACTICE IN-PERSON INTERACTIONS

"Our generation, we mainly grew up with phones, and we didn't have the face-to-face communication. I've had the situation where I went up to someone and apologized but I really had no idea how to approach it because I always use a phone to apologize."

MIDDLE SCHOOL BOY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How do you model working through difficult conversations in front of and with your child?
- How can we encourage more face-to-face interaction in our lives?

EXPRESSION VS. SUPPRESSION

"Teenagers who are really feeling as though they can't express emotions to people around them often suppress. And what we found in laboratory studies and in the field is that when people try to use suppression, they can look cool, but they don't feel cool. And furthermore, their thinking process is slowed down."

JAMES GROSS, PHD
Director, Psychophysiology
Laboratory Stanford University

Helping young people name and express emotions helps them cope with those emotions as they arise.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- How and when do you talk to your children about your own emotional experience?
- What strategies do you use to express and work through your own emotions? How and when do you share those with your children?

EXPOSURE THERAPY FOR ANXIETY

"The treatment for anxiety is called exposure therapy, which is changing your behavior to do the things that you're avoiding and that you're afraid of over and over and over again."

JENNIFER TENINENKO
Adolescent Psychologist
Co-Director, Child Anxiety Center

"What you do, is you do the exposure and then you start a timer. Once you've finished the exposure and you write down from one to 10, the number that your anxiety's at, and you keep the timer going until you feel like your anxiety has gone down by at least half. And then the goal is that, that, that time that it took for your anxiety to go down gets less and less the more you do the exposure."

OLIVIA
Student

When a person is anxious, their brain is warning them they are in danger. When the feeling of fear consistently does not fit the fact, this is can signal an anxiety condition. Exposure therapy trains the brain to respond in different, and more constructive ways, to whatever trigger is causing their fear. Students struggling with severe anxiety will benefit from support from a professional therapist, and exposure therapy may well be part of the approach they use to help.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What is your response to the idea of exposure therapy?
- Have you ever had an experience similar to exposure therapy, where you've faced a fear? What was that like?

BEHAVIORAL ACTIVATION FOR DEPRESSION: DOING AND CONNECTING

"So the primary treatment for treating depression is behavioral activation. It's doing valued activities and connecting with other people."

JENNIFER TININENKO, PHD
Adolescent Psychologist
Co-Director, Child Anxiety Center

A young person coping with depression will benefit from professional assessment and support. Professional counseling can help young people name and understand their experience, and can help parents and kids learn to communicate with one another more effectively.

At home, parents can support kids to explore and access activities that will help them feel connected, and to encourage connection with family, friends, and trusted adults at school or elsewhere in the community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Which activities and connections do you think might help your teen feel more connected and motivated?
- If your child were in need of this kind of support, how might you go about building a team to help them, without stepping into the problem solving role?

CLOSING OUT YOUR EVENT QUESTIONS:

- What can we do in our homes to promote mental health?
- What can we do in our school to promote mental health?
- ScreenagersMovie.com offers many resources for further learning and information.



Engagement Activities for Educators



The engagement activities for educators will support deeper learning and explore ways to strengthen resilience practices and mental wellbeing in classrooms, schools, and homes.

There is also a poster included that features memorable moments and quotes from the film. Post it in your classroom to remind students of important social and emotional learning messages from the film throughout the school year.

IDEAS FOR SCREENING THE FULL FILM IN CLASS

Watching *Screenagers NEXT CHAPTER* may bring up some strong emotions for students. It is likely that one or more students in your class has in the past, or is currently coping with one or more of the mental health challenges in this film. The stigma surrounding mental health is real and students struggling with stress, anxiety or depression who are in your class may feel vulnerable. A letter/email home to parents/caregivers prior to watching the film will be important to communicate.

Revisit class agreements about confidentiality and respecting one another before watching, and make sure you are aware of mental health resources available in the school for referrals if strong reactions come up during or after the film.

As they watch, encourage students to take notes, writing down key words, phrases or ideas of interest to them, as well as questions that arise.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- What is one quote or statement from the film that you want to share, reenforce, or discuss?
- What did you see or hear about in the film that was important or interesting to you?
- Does the film seem true to your experience and/or that of your peers? Why or why not?
- How do you think screens relate to mental well-being?
- Did you see anything that might influence how you want to use your personal device or social media?
- What tools do you use on screens that you believe are constructive?
- What do you think is important for other young people to learn from the film?
- What do you want the supportive adults in your life to learn from this film?
- What aspects of mental health and wellness would you like to learn more about?

SUGGESTED REFLECTIVE WRITING**PROMPT:**

It may be helpful to have students take a moment and collect their thoughts and feelings in an individual writing exercise before a class discussion.

Writing Prompt:

Write a letter to one of the young people, parents or trusted adults in the film whose words or experience meant something to you. The letter might address one or more of the following questions:

- What does their experience mean to you?
- What questions would you like to ask them?
- What would you like them to know about you or your experience?

**If you choose to do a reflective writing exercise, consider keeping it confidential so students feel free to write about personal experiences.

GROUP ACTIVITIES*Key Concepts Jigsaw*

Using the Overview of Key Concepts documents from this guide as a starting place, split students

into a jigsaw exercise, where small groups research and answer the following questions about one of the key concepts: stress, anxiety, depression, sleep or adolescent brain development. Each group will then present what they've learned back to one another:

- What is the definition of your key concept?
- Why is your key concept important for young people to learn about?
- How are screen time and social media related to your key concept?
- What do others need to know about your key concept in order to promote mental wellbeing?

Resilience Toolbox

To integrate learning from the film into the classroom on a yearlong basis, consider creating a classroom Resilience Toolbox.

After watching the film, ask students to identify and write down the strategies they saw in the film that built resilience. Some of those may include:

- Mindfulness apps
- Distraction, laughter
- Finding groups of others with similar struggles to feel less alone
- Music, art, dance
- Seeking peer-to-peer advice
- Doing what you love

Ask students to write their own list of supports they rely on when they are in need of a mental wellness boost.

Create a poster, or an actual box, that represents your "Class Resilience Toolbox" for students to revisit and revise throughout the year.

Students may share ideas with others in their schools or peer networks with a #ResilienceToolbox Campaign to build their own and their peer's vocabulary and skills around resilience and mental well-being.



STUDENT-LED MENTAL HEALTH EFFORTS

Mental Health Club at Schools:

"Throughout middle school when I was like going through struggles, I was just having a very, very hard time emotionally and mentally and I didn't realize that it was a mental health problem and that it was an actual problem that could be addressed rather than something that was, that I was imagining. I definitely used to think that going to the counselors would be some sort of like sign of weakness on my part. And I didn't want to admit that to myself."

EUNSOO
Student

In the film, Eunsoo and Ella form a mental health club at their school to normalize conversations about mental health and to teach their peers, and younger teens, emotional intelligence vocabulary and skills. If establishing a similar club in your school is of interest, speak to your teacher or school counselor and advocate for ways to create this support network.

Bring Change to Mind is a non-profit organization that offers tools and suggestions for building mental health clubs in schools.

The mental health club featured in the film began with a partnership with [Forefront in the Schools \(FIS\)](#). This is an initiative of Forefront Suicide Prevention at the University of Washington that helps schools with mental health and suicide prevention efforts.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention offers programs, research and advocacy work to increase the frequency and effectiveness of suicide prevention programs in schools across the country.

[The JED Foundation](#) is a good place to look for resources. Through a combination of online resources, awareness campaign materials, advising and consultation, and training opportunities, JED supports high schools in doing what they can to protect the emotional well-being of their students

Social Emotional Learning Resources

The classroom is a critical place to learn and practice social and emotional skills that promote mental health. The following resources can help educators identify resources to incorporate into their classrooms:

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)
The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning ([CASEL](#)) has an extensive list of social/ emotional programs that can be brought to schools.

They have many more tools, such as research that shows that when schools incorporate SEL, they find on average an [11% increase](#) in academic achievement and an increase in emotional wellbeing.



[Second Step through Committee for Children](#)

When we meet Dana at school learning about emotions, coping with hard emotions, that school was using The Second Step Middle School SEL Program. This program is an SEL curriculum that has many different components for grades 6-8, and has a fee.

Mood Meter

The Mood Meter is part of Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence's RULER program for integrating emotional intelligence across the school curriculum. RULER stands for recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating emotions, and is designed to help educators and students name emotions, identify what triggers and changes them, and find healthy ways to cope with and regulate them. The program offers professional development, classroom ideas and family engagement materials.

Mindfulness Practices

Mindfulness is a set of skills and practices that can help young people cope with stress in the classroom and beyond. Mindfulness practices can include breathing exercises, meditation, guided visualization and relaxation techniques, and more.

There are several mindfulness apps, like Headspace, that students can use on their own.

[MindfulSchools.org](#) offers resources, classroom ideas and audio files, and paid professional development training for a Mindful Teacher certification program.