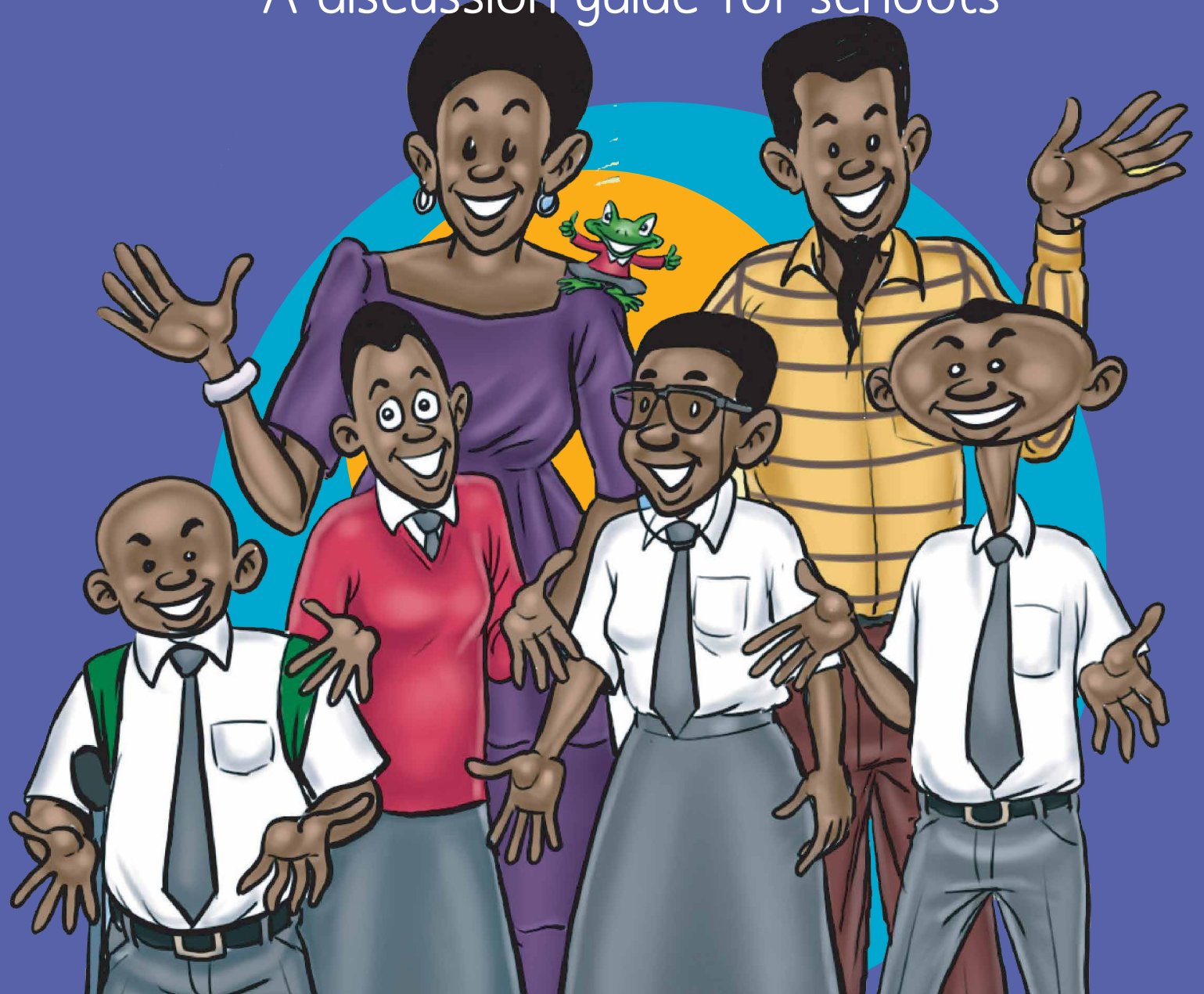




Promoting positive mental health

A discussion guide for schools



Ministry of Education and Sports

 Raising Voices

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Foreword

In today's educational environment, the mental well-being of learners and teachers is as critical as academic achievement. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), through the Department of Guidance and Counselling, is mandated to plan, formulate, monitor, analyse, evaluate, and review policies; provide technical support and guidance; and set standards for the implementation of mental health interventions in educational institutions across Uganda.

The *Promoting Positive Mental Health Guide*, developed by Raising Voices and endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Sports, is a timely and valuable resource aimed at promoting the mental well-being of learners and school staff. The guide has been carefully designed to equip both primary and secondary schools with practical tools and evidence-informed approaches to support and enhance mental well-being within the school community.

This guide addresses a wide range of essential topics, including understanding mental health, recognizing and responding to common mental health challenges in schools, self-care and collective care practices, implementation of supportive strategies, and the creation of a positive and inclusive school environment. The content is structured into learner and teacher-focused sessions that encourage interactive engagement and meaningful learning. The suggested activities are carefully aligned to complement existing school programmes and initiatives.

I urge all education stakeholders to embrace this resource with commitment and purpose. Your role in promoting positive mental health is vital, and your dedication will make a meaningful difference in the lives of our learners and staff. I encourage you to take time to engage fully with the material, participate actively in its implementation, and apply these insights in your daily professional practice.

On behalf of the Ministry of Education and Sports, I commend Raising Voices for their collaboration and contribution to advancing mental health promotion in schools. We are confident that the effective use of this guide will strengthen supportive school environments and significantly enhance the mental well-being of learners across the country.



Dr. Kedrace R. Turyagyenda

PERMANENT SECRETARY

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS



Acknowledgment

We extend our sincere gratitude to all individuals and organizations whose time, expertise, and unwavering commitment contributed to the development of this **Mental Health Guide**. Your collective efforts have been instrumental in producing a valuable resource that advances mental well-being within Uganda's education system.

The **Government of Uganda**, through the **Ministry of Education and Sports**, is committed to promoting the welfare of teachers and learners across the country. The **Department of Guidance and Counselling Department** is particularly recognized for providing technical leadership, guidance, and support, as well as for setting standards that inform the effective implementation of guidance and counselling programs in educational institutions.

Special thanks go to the **Guidance and Counselling Technical Working Group** and the **Gender in Education Technical Working Group**, whose diverse representation from Government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), civil society organizations, development partners, and local actors supporting psychosocial interventions in schools provided invaluable insights, greatly enhancing the guide's relevance and practical application.

We specifically thank **Strong Minds, Miles of Smiles, and Asante Foundation**, as well as the **Commissioner, Guidance and Counselling, Ms. Harriet Ajilong, and her staff**, for their time, thoughtful input, and detailed feedback.

We also appreciate the schools that participated in the pilot: **Kyassa Secondary School, Kassengejje Secondary School, Outspan Primary School, and St. Paul Kyebando Primary School**. Your active engagement and constructive feedback were critical in refining and strengthening the guide. Our heartfelt thanks go to the dedicated teams at **Raising Voices**, whose collaboration was central to the successful development of this guide.

Finally, we pay special tribute to the **children of Uganda**, whose resilience and commitment to education continue to inspire our work. To all stakeholders advancing mental health in education, this guide reflects our shared vision of fostering safe, supportive, and mentally healthy learning environments for every child.



Dr. Cleophus Mugenyi

DIRECTOR BASIC AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SPORTS



Objectives of the mental health module

1. Develop basic skills for managing day-to-day mental health problems.
2. Reduce stigma around mental health problems in schools.
3. Provide shared language for talking about mental health.



Table of contents

Overview	7
About this mental health guide	8
What inspired the development of the guide?	8
Expected outcomes of using this guide	9
How does it work?	9
How can this guide help?	10
Who is this guide for?	10
How to use this guide	10
Discussion sessions and school activities	11
Materials	12
How long will it take to implement this guide?	13
A brighter future	14
Discussion Sessions	15
Discussion Session 1: Exploring mental health	16
Prior reading notes for the facilitator	17
School activities for exploring mental health in schools	21
Expected outcomes	22
Discussion Session 2: Understanding mental health problems at school	23
Prior reading notes for the facilitator	24
School activities for understanding common mental health problems in schools	28
Mental health identification card	29
Expected outcomes	30
Discussion Session 3: Exploring self-care	31
Prior reading notes for the facilitator	32
School activities for understanding common mental health problems in schools	34
Expected outcomes	36
Discussion Session 4: Exploring power and mental health	37
Prior reading notes for the facilitator	38
Suggested activities for exploring power and mental health	40
Expected outcomes	41
Discussion Session 5: Creating an enabling environment for everyone's mental well-being	42
Prior reading notes for the facilitator	43
Suggested activities for creating an enabling environment	45
Expected outcomes	45
Discussion Session 6: Moving forward!	46
Suggested activities	48
Expected outcomes	48
Final word	49





About this mental health guide

This mental health discussion guide is a resource developed by Raising Voices to help address the mental health needs of schools. It is designed to help schools and educators address the day-to-day mental health problems that students and teachers may experience, provide basic skills and information for managing common mental health problems, and suggest ideas for schools, teachers and learners to maintain positive mental health. This guide does not address clinical mental health conditions, although through this guide, teachers and potentially even caregivers can be in a position to recognize mental health problems among learners and seek further medical support for severe cases.



Although we are not doctors or psychologists, we do have some helpful tips for promoting positive mental health!

What inspired the development of the guide?

Through years of preventing violence against children, it has become clear that there is a strong relationship between violence and mental health. Some children experience violence because of their mental health challenges, while others may experience mental health challenges because of violence. As it is Raising Voices' core mission to prevent violence against women and children in schools and communities, we believe that both violence and mental health require thoughtful discussions and actions and, thus, we developed this mental health guide.

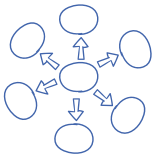
The guide contains school activities, discussion guides and tools that can enable schools to learn more about mental health and create an environment that promotes positive mental health. Discussions and activities are facilitated by the teacher protagonists and student committees that lead their implementation in schools.



Once we understand our mental health better, we can help each other to cope with difficult situations and bounce back quicker!

Expected outcomes of using this guide

1



Processes and structures for integrating mental health into school life

2



School-wide knowledge and understanding of mental health

3



A common language for talking about mental health

4



Reduced stigma, a compassionate, inclusive and violence-free environment for everyone in school

How does it work?

We recommend six core sessions alongside school-wide activities. Each session involves a combination of discussion questions, support materials (posters, PowerPoints) and suggested activities (school assemblies, check-ins) to help guide the process and deepen understanding of the topics. The six sessions can be implemented over six months (i.e., one session per month).

It is important for the facilitator to read through the prior reading notes in each session before engaging in discussion questions. It is also important for the facilitator and the group to read the reference materials suggested before engaging in the discussion questions.





How can this guide help?

Our minds are like gardens, and our thoughts are like seeds. We can grow flowers, or we can grow weeds. Raising Voices has created this discussion and activity guide to share simple skills and knowledge for dealing with those “weeds,” or common mental health problems in schools, and promoting “flowers,” or positive mental health.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for both teachers and learners, but it can be used by others who find it useful.

How to use this guide

You will select mental health protagonists to conduct activities as suggested in this guide. The protagonists will take the lead on supporting their school to explore key ideas about mental health and share these with the wider school community. A nurse, a teacher or older learners who have been exposed to mental health ideas before could be prioritized as mental health protagonists.

Note: While engaging with learners, ensure that your school implements diverse activities to help fully include those who may have disabilities (for example, writing, reading, drawing and shading for those with speech and hearing impairments, or music, dance and drama for those with sight impairments).

Discussion sessions and school activities

Six discussion sessions

The mental health module has six discussion sessions that complement and build on each other.

Each discussion session is followed by school activities designed to engage the entire school community in understanding the mental health concept better.

Summary of discussion sessions

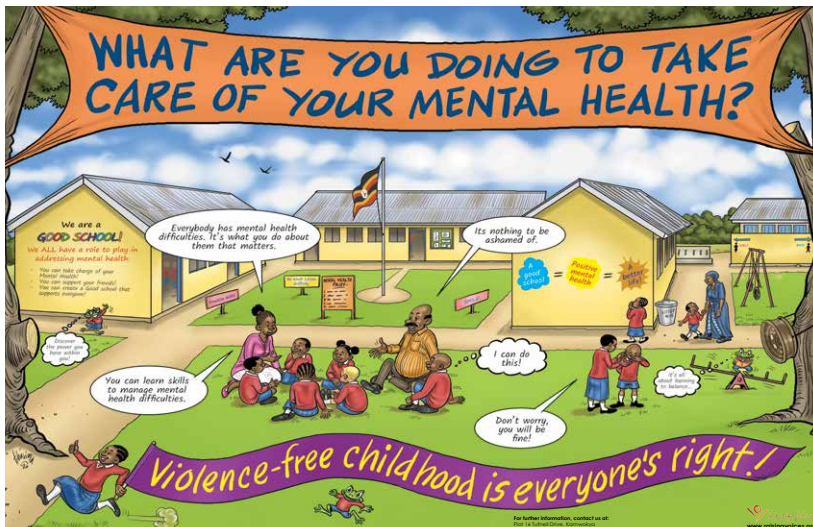


Materials

The mental health module is supplemented by a cartoon booklet and poster with colorful drawings and messages designed to spark discussions and reinforce key messages about mental health.

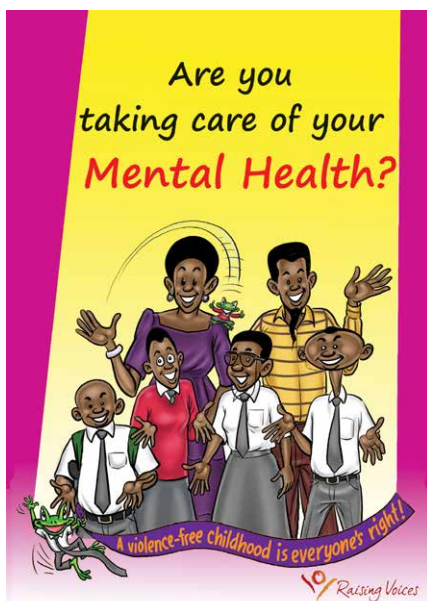
Poster

What Are You Doing to Take Care of Your Mental Health?



Cartoon booklet

Are You Taking Care of Your Mental Health?





How long will it take to implement this guide?

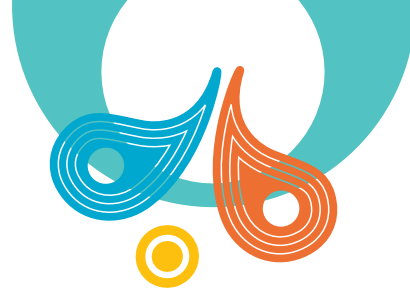
On average, it will take a school six months (approximately two school terms) to implement the ideas suggested in this guide.



Let's get started!

Five practical steps schools can take to address mental health





A brighter future

Schools have a mandate to make many positive changes in the lives of their learners. Through its insights and supportive tools, this guide can empower your school to positively change the experiences of learners by providing support for mental health problems. We sincerely hope that as a school that cares about its learners and teachers, you will make use of this guide and stay committed to creating a safe and positive learning environment for all.

If you have any comments or questions, please reach out to us at info@raisingvoices.org.

We wish you well on your learning journey!



Discussion Sessions



Discussion Session 1: Exploring mental health

Estimated time: 60 minutes



Objective

To introduce participants to the concept of mental health.

Materials


Poster: *What Are You Doing to Take Care of Your Mental Health?*

Cartoon booklet: *Are You Taking Care of Your Mental Health?*

Facilitator preparations

Read the prior reading notes for the facilitator on the following pages to enable you to hold a successful discussion.

Do any of the following to bring the group together, build trust and create a safe space: sing a fun local song, play a quick icebreaker, dance to a popular song, take three deep breaths together or invite someone to say a prayer.



Prior reading notes for the facilitator

What is mental health?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a “state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

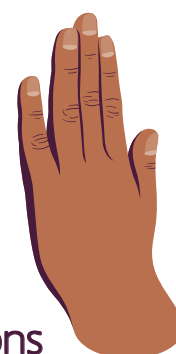
Mental health involves how a person **feels, thinks and acts**. We all have mental health, and we all need to take care of it. It affects how we think and feel about ourselves. It also affects how we act and determines how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices.



Feelings



Thoughts



Actions

Feelings

Like the weather, feelings come and go. Sometimes it's sunny, and other times it's rainy. Likewise, sometimes you feel high, and other times you feel low.

However, when the same feelings keep coming up and you start to draw conclusions about your

Positive feelings	Negative feelings
Happy	Scared
Excited	Sad
Peaceful	Hopeless
Hopeful	Anxious
Confident	Embarrassed
Love	Angry

worth as a person, they start affecting your mental health. For example, a learner may feel embarrassed about a teacher beating them in front of the class. If this happens again and again, they may start feeling ashamed, and it may negatively affect their mental health. On the other hand, a learner may feel cared for by a teacher who reassures them and provides helpful feedback. If this happens again and again, they may grow more confident, and it may positively

affect their mental health.





Thoughts

We have thoughts all the time. Examples of thoughts include, "I tried my best," "Nobody likes me," "I'll never get better at this," and "My friend will help me if I need them."

When you start identifying with the thoughts, you create a belief about what is possible and what is not. If you start to believe that these thoughts signal who you are, they can have positive or negative effects on your mental health.



Actions

Actions are the things you do or the way you behave. Examples of actions include choosing to walk away if someone makes you feel angry or choosing to shout at them. Other actions may include giving up on a difficult assignment or not talking to a teacher who made you feel scared.

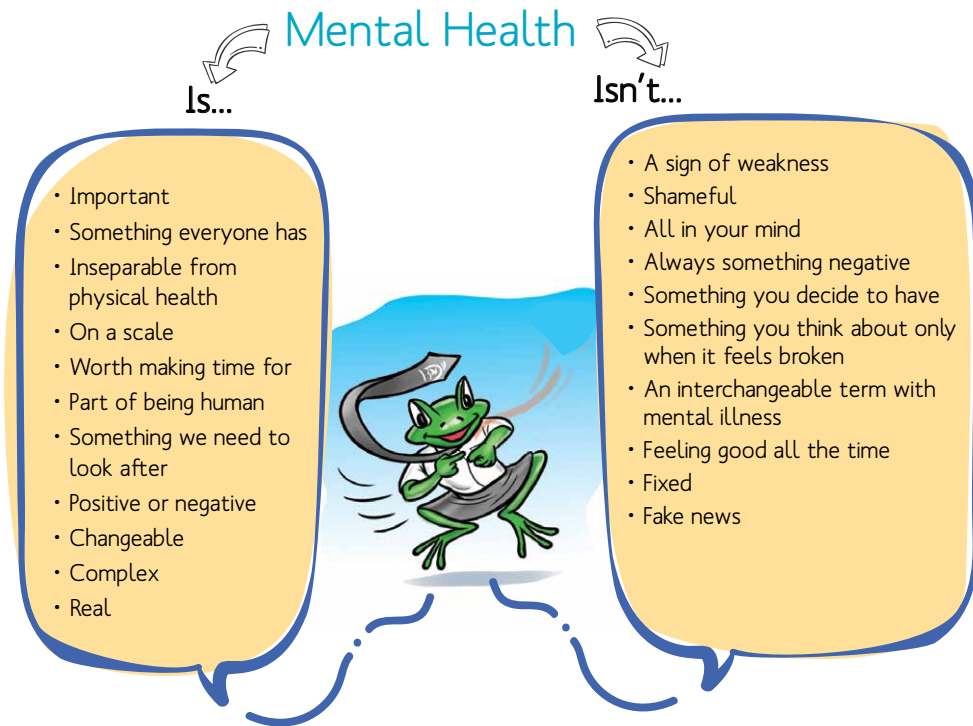
How you manage your feelings and thoughts, and what beliefs or actions you create from them, can have a deep impact on your mental health.

Positive and hopeful beliefs such as "I tried my best," "I can get better," and "People like me" lead to positive mental health. Negative beliefs such as "I am stupid," "I can never learn this," and "People don't like me" can have a long-lasting negative effect on your mood, behavior and even mental health.



Mental health and physical health

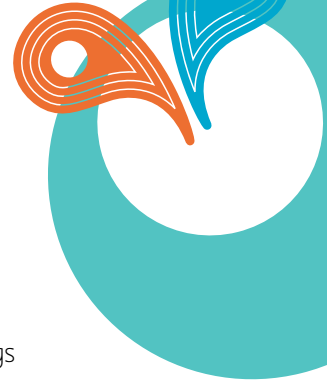
Everyone has mental health, just like everyone has physical health. Sometimes, we feel okay in our bodies, and other times, we do not. When we have pain in our bodies, we may require professional help. If we do not seek treatment, the problem can get worse. The same is also true of our mental health.



Mental health exists on a scale.

Mental health is on a scale, meaning it changes over time, and it is normal to have ups and downs. When someone is in a good environment, their mental health may be positive, but if they start to encounter daily stresses and unpleasant experiences, their mental health can become poor. If this is not addressed, it can progress to more severe mental health problems that may require professional help.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Excelling	Thriving	Surviving	Struggling	In crisis
Cheerful Joyful Energetic High performance Fully realising potential	Positive Calm Performing Sleeping well Eating normally Normal social activity	Worried Nervous Irritable Sad Trouble sleeping Distracted Withdrawn	Anxious Depressed Tired Poor performance Poor sleep Poor appetite	Very anxious Very low mood Absenteeism Exhausted Very poor sleep Weight loss



Exercise

1. Start the discussion by inviting participants to make funny faces to show different feelings (such as happy, sad, angry or surprised).
2. Tell them that on the count of 3, you invite them to make an imaginary selfie of their face. Count to 3.
3. Express that the key is to listen, acknowledge and accept all feelings.

Discussion questions

1. What does mental health mean to you?
2. Does everyone have mental health?
3. How do you know if you are experiencing good or poor mental health?

End the discussion by emphasizing that:

- Everyone has mental health.
- It is important for us to take care of our mental health just like we take care of our physical health.
- Sometimes, our mental health is okay, and other times, it is not. And that's okay!



School activities for exploring mental health in schools



1. **Talk at the school assembly:** The head teacher or teacher holds a 10- to 15-minute talk at the school assembly introducing learners to mental health using the following talking points:
 - Mental health involves how we think, feel and act. Good mental health improves how we learn, play and relate to each other.
 - Our mental health changes from day to day, like the weather. Sometimes, we feel okay; at times, we feel somewhat okay; and other times, we feel very bad. All that is normal and part of being human.
 - Addressing mental health problems and promoting positive mental health is a collective responsibility for everyone.
2. **Hold a cartoon booklet discussion:** Explore the cartoon booklet *Are You Taking Care of Your Mental Health?* For example, learners can read the booklet in their respective classrooms.
3. **Pin up posters for discussion:** Place posters on the school notice board, staff room and classrooms for teachers and learners to continue engaging with the discussions.
4. **Hold school debates** on mental health to dispel common myths. Debate topics could include: "People suffering mental illness are bewitched," "People experiencing mental illness are mad," "Only adults have mental health," and "People with mental health problems do not function normally."
5. **Conduct short skits:** Ask learners to act out a short skit at the school assembly. The following is an example of a storyline you could use:

Rose, George and Peter are getting together at break time to play ball. Rose calls their friend Miriam, who is sitting by herself: "Miriam, come join us!" But Miriam says she doesn't feel like it. Peter is surprised. Miriam always loved to play ball. Now, she never wants to join anymore. George says, "Just leave her. She never wants to play and always just sits there by herself! Maybe she no longer likes us." Oh! But Rose has a different view: "You know, I am worried about Miriam. She often looks sad these days, and her confidence is so low." George responds, "So what? She just needs to make an effort. In the meantime, let's play without her. Come on, break is almost over!"

Peter disagrees with George. He explains that if someone seems to always be sad for a long time and does not enjoy the things they liked before, it can be a sign that they are experiencing mental health problems. George looks at Peter as if Peter is mad! Rose quickly adds, "You are right, Peter. George, mental health is just like physical health. Sometimes, you feel fine, and other times, you feel bad. Sometimes, you need support from someone else to get better. If we exclude her, she will only feel worse. Let's find out what's going on. Maybe we can help" The whole group walks over to Miriam.

Expected outcomes

- Teachers and learners have a better understanding of mental health.
- Learners can define basic mental health concepts.
- The school develops a common language for talking about mental health.
- There is reduced stigma against those experiencing mental health problems.





Discussion Session 2: Understanding mental health problems at school

Estimated time: 60 minutes

Objective

To help participants understand common mental health problems and gain skills on how to identify them in themselves and others.

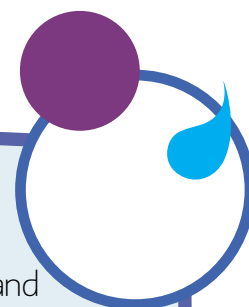
Materials

Cartoon booklet: *Are You Taking Care of Your Mental Health?*

Facilitator preparations

Read the prior reading notes for the facilitator on the following pages to enable you to hold a successful discussion.

Do any of the following to bring the group together, build trust and create a safe space: sing a fun local song, play a quick icebreaker, dance to a popular song, take three deep breaths together or invite someone to say a prayer.





Prior reading notes for the facilitator

Mental health problem	Symptoms
<p>Anxiety</p> <p>Feeling of extreme fear, tension and restlessness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being afraid of daily life and constantly worried • Feeling uncomfortable about new places and people • Physical symptoms such as pounding heart, breathing fast, stomachache, teeth-grinding or bedwetting • Feeling judged all the time • Low self-confidence
<p>Depression</p> <p>Constant feeling of sadness over a long period of time, a loss of interest in the things around you that affects your normal routine; can range from minor to severe; may occur from one particular incident or a build-up of many bad incidents/experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of interest in the things you used to enjoy • Low self-esteem • Feeling disconnected from people • Physical symptoms like crying more than usual, changes in sleep patterns and appetite, and low energy • Feeling hopeless or even suicidal
<p>Suicidality and self-harm</p> <p>Suicidal thoughts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal from peers • Loss of interest in things you enjoyed doing • Research about suicide • Verbalizing suicidal thoughts • Envy people who have passed on • Involvement in risky behavior like harming self using sharp objects • Violent actions toward self and others
<p>Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)</p> <p>Can occur after experiencing a highly scary and stressful event or series of events—for example, rape, witnessing a murder, an accident or torture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nightmares • Flashbacks to the highly stressful event or series of events • Feeling afraid even when there is no immediate risk • Feeling as if the bad event is happening over and over again • Feeling detached from people • Avoiding people or places that remind you of the bad event





<p>Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easily distracted• Difficulty concentrating• Being overactive• Feeling restless and impulsive• Daydreaming a lot• Being slow or too fast to complete tasks
<p>Aggression or behavior challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Restlessness and also being very distracting to others• Using strong or negative language that is abusive or embarrassing• Getting into many fights or seeming “rough”• Wanting to badly hurt others• Displaying strong, out-of-control behavior that can hurt self or others• Having trouble listening to those in authority• Abusing drugs or alcohol or being unable to control consumption• Gaining satisfaction from seeing others in pain
<p>Shame</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Constantly feeling inadequate• Feeling embarrassed• Not feeling good about or proud of yourself• Constant low self-esteem• Blaming self even for things that have nothing to do with you





Five important points to keep in mind:

1. Remember that these are simply indicators of the problem. The most accurate way of understanding if a person is experiencing mental health problems is by referring them to a professional service provider (professional counselor or nearby health facility).
2. If you notice any of these indicators in a learner, talk to them in a supportive way without blame or judgment. Let them know you care and want to support them.
3. Remember, it is not someone's fault if they are experiencing mental health challenges. They also want to get better.
4. Mental health problems are sensitive and can lead to stigma. If someone comes to you with a mental health concern, it is a sign that they trust you. Take care to keep the matter confidential and not discuss the situation with others unless you have their permission to talk to their parents/guardians or a professional.
5. If you are worried that they may seriously hurt themselves or someone else, seek help from a mental health professional right away. You can access mental health service providers in the government hospital closest to you.



Exercise

1. Invite the group to describe how they are feeling using the weather (for example, sunny, cloudy, rainy, stormy or bright, clear-blue skies).
2. After participants have shared, remind them that mental health is like weather; we all experience good days, not-so-good days and some very challenging days. These very challenging days sometimes lead to mental health problems.

Discussion question

1. What are some of the common mental health problems learners experience in our school?

End the discussion by emphasizing that:

- It is common to have mental health problems, and people with mental health problems are not different from anyone else.
- We all can do a few small things to keep our mental health strong or help those who are experiencing difficulties.
- Violence against children exacerbates their mental health problems and makes them vulnerable to experiencing more violence.
- It is important for us to take care of our mental health just like we take care of our physical health.
- Sometimes, our mental health is okay, and other times, it is not. And that's okay!



School activities for understanding common mental health problems in schools



1. **Use the school notice board to create awareness:** Learners can use the school notice board to write/draw and share widely about the common mental health problems in schools.
2. **Hold a talk or assembly:** Teachers and/or headteachers can hold a talk with learners in school assemblies, classrooms or dormitories. Whenever possible, end the talk by sharing with learners possible places they can find help if they need to.
3. **Organize question-and-answer sessions:** School administrators, teachers, the school nurse or counselors can respond to questions from learners. This may work best when done in different classes. This can happen once each school term.
4. **Have teachers practice and use the mental health identification card:** Teachers can photocopy the mental health identification card on the next page and practice using it.



How to know if a learner is experiencing a mental health problem

Everyone experiences emotional ups and downs. Use the mental health identification card to help identify symptoms and behaviors in learners who may be experiencing mental health problems.

Mental health identification card

Internal problems affecting thoughts and feelings

These may not be visible, but still affect how the child feels or thinks about themselves:

- Is often sad or withdrawn, has low self-esteem or no longer wants to be with friends
- Has strong worries or fears that get in the way of daily life
- Experiences sudden, strong fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart or fast breathing; this may happen frequently in class and at home
- Experiences ongoing stress, worry or fear after a difficult life event
- Has extreme difficulty concentrating or seems like they are “not in class” even when they are; their school grades may suffer
- Experiences large shifts in mood that cause social and academic problems (for example, being very excited sometimes and very sad other times)
- Feels tired of life, ashamed much of the time, alone in the world or that life is no longer worth living

External problems often affecting behaviors

These mainly affect behavior and how they relate to others:

- Is regularly irritable or often starts arguments
- Often has trouble listening to those in authority
- Compared to other children, is jumpy or unable to sit still; this may put the learner in physical danger, affect their grades or distract other learners in the class
- Uses strong negative language that is abusive or embarrassing
- Gets into many fights, seems rough and wants to badly hurt others
- Displays strong, out-of-control behavior that can hurt themselves or others
- Repeatedly uses drugs or alcohol

Physical problems

As mental health and physical health are related, a child may experience these problems in their body because of poor mental health:

- Has frequent stomachaches, headaches or fainting spells
- Experiences changes or difficulties with eating or sleeping
- Tries to harm themselves or makes plans to do so

Note: These signs may vary from person to person. Some people who may seemingly look the happiest could be experiencing severe mental health problems.

Expected outcomes

- Teachers and learners are aware of common mental health problems.
- Teachers and learners can recognize and describe their own mental health needs.
- Learners and teachers experiencing mental health problems receive appropriate support and care.
- There is reduced stigma around mental health throughout the school.





Discussion Session 3: Exploring self-care

Estimated time: 60 minutes



Objective

For participants to explore different ways to take care of their mental health.



Materials

Self and collective care PowerPoint presentation (attached at the back of this guide)

Facilitator preparations

Read the prior reading notes for the facilitator on the following pages to enable you to hold a successful discussion.

Do any of the following to bring the group together, build trust and create a safe space: sing a fun local song, play a quick icebreaker, dance to a popular song, take three deep breaths together or invite someone to say a prayer.





Prior reading notes for the facilitator

Daily stressors: In life, we always encounter things that cause a strain on our mental health. These may include failure to meet our basic needs, experiences of violence or strained relationships, among others. We can all take a steps to counter such stressors and nourish our mental health. Here are some ideas.

Mind

- Learn a new creative skill, like cooking, painting or dancing.
- Write your thoughts down on paper.
- Notice negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones.
- Set short-term and easily achievable goals for yourself; break them up into bite-sized pieces and celebrate every success.
- Take a deep breath and listen to the sounds you can hear around you.

Body

- Eat healthy foods like fresh fruit and vegetables, and drink enough water.
- Get regular exercise like playing your favorite sport, dancing, stretching or working in the vegetable garden.
- Avoid caffeine before bed, smoking, alcohol and lots of refined sugar.
- Ensure you get good-quality sleep.
- Listen to your body; recognize when it's tired and take a break.

Heart

- Talk to a friend you trust.
- Make time to do the things you love, like listening to music, reading a book, walking in nature and singing.
- Surround yourself with positive people and make new friends; stay away from negative energy and conversations that make you feel sad.
- Watch something or spend time with someone who makes you laugh.
- Spend time with the people you care about, like your family or close friends.

Spirit

- Create quiet time for yourself (for example, switch off the TV or mobile phone for some time).
- Have an attitude of gratitude; think of three things every day to be grateful for, however small.
- Forgive yourself for things that have not gone well.
- Be kind and of service to others; reach out to someone who is struggling and listen to them without judgment or advice.
- Exchange a smile or a few kind words with someone who needs it.
- Pray.
- Practice meditation often; meditation is a practice of focusing your attention in a way that helps your mind and body feel calmer and more relaxed.



Exercise

1. Invite the group to sit comfortably in their chairs with their feet on the ground, back straight and hands relaxed on their legs. Invite them to close their eyes if they feel comfortable. If not, they can look at a spot on the ground in front of them.
2. Explain that for 20 seconds, they are going to count on their fingers the number of sounds they can hear. Remind them that it is not a competition. Begin the exercise.
3. After 20 seconds, invite them to share what sounds they heard.
4. Do the exercise again, but encourage them to listen for sounds they didn't hear before. At the end, ask them how they are feeling now.

Remember that the key is to listen, acknowledge and accept all feelings. You don't need to agree with or understand the feeling in order to be supportive and empathetic. If there is time, ask further questions that invite sharing and exploration.

Discussion questions

1. What are some examples of daily stressors we experience?
2. Why is it important to take care of our mental health as teachers and learners?
3. What practical things are you doing to take care of your mental health?
(Refer to the prior reading notes for the facilitator.)
4. What are the obstacles to practicing self-care?

End the discussion by emphasizing that:

- For teachers to better support themselves, their learners and their families, they also need to care for their own mental health.
- Learners need to know about self-care to navigate the daily stresses of life.
- We all have an important role in promoting the collective care of everyone in the school!
- While exercising self-care, it is important to pay attention to your body, mind, heart and spirit.



Asking for help

Finally, remember to ask for help when you need it. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness!

In- school activities for promoting self-care







Suggested activities for promoting self-care

1. **Integrate self-care into regular school activities** like sports, entertainment, music, dance, drama and mealtimes. Ensure that the school is clear on resting time for learners and encourages them to rest!
2. **Develop a self-care inspirational wall:** Referring back to the self-care discussion, the teacher protagonist can post a list of ideas in the staff room for promoting self-care. Similarly, the learners leading their Good School Committee can encourage each class to create its own self-care wall.
3. **Create a self-care plan for teachers and learners that includes simple things they can do daily or routinely** to take care of their mental health. For example, the Students' Good School Committee can share a sample self-care plan with their peers and encourage them to develop individual customized plans.
4. **See the table on the next page** for a sample self-care plan.



Sample self-care plan

	Mind	Body	Heart	Spirit
				
Monday	Break down your goals into small, manageable goals	Jog for 20-30 minutes	Call up an old friend or family member you haven't spoken to in a while	Practice devotion
Tuesday	Borrow/buy a new book and read it	Drink four to six liters of water	Listen to your favorite music	Pray
Wednesday	Try out a new hobby	Eat lots of vegetables and fruits	Speak words of affirmation to yourself	Show kindness to a stranger
Thursday	Practice replacing negative thoughts with positive thoughts	Play some sports	Give hugs to your loved ones	Practice breathing in and out
Friday	Learn a new skill	Eat your favorite meal	Dance to your favorite music	Create time for yourself without TV, phone or other distractors
Saturday	Play some indoor games, like chess or Scrabble	Do some general cleaning of your house/space	Spend some time enjoying nature	Help out a friend or family member in need
Sunday	Learn at least five words in a new language	Take a nap	Make a list of things you are grateful for	Practice five minutes of meditation



Expected outcomes

- Teachers and learners understand self-care and increase self-care activities in their daily lives.
- Teachers and learners develop and practice their self-care plans.
- The school integrates routine activities that promote self-care (for example, ensuring that all learners participate in physical education activities and music, dance and drama; ensuring learners are getting enough rest).





Discussion Session 4: Exploring power and mental health

Estimated time: 60 minutes

Objective

To identify ways we can use our power to promote mental well-being.

Materials

Cartoon booklet: *Are You Taking Care of Your Mental Health?*, pages 23-44

Cartoon booklet: *How Do You Use Your Power?*

Facilitator preparations

Read the prior reading notes for the facilitator on the following pages to enable you to hold a successful discussion.

Do any of the following to bring the group together, build trust and create a safe space: sing a fun local song, play a quick icebreaker, dance to a popular song, take three deep breaths together or invite someone to say a prayer.



Prior reading notes for the facilitator

Using our power to respond to mental health problems

Power is the ability to believe in yourself, make choices, take action, help others or hurt others. This also contributes to our mental health experiences. How we use our power or support others can either exacerbate mental health problems or improve them.

Power within is the ability to believe in ourselves and our potential.

- When we use our power within, we are able to handle stressful experiences better and help others.
- Speaking words of encouragement to ourselves and others reminds us things will get better.
- Power within helps us to speak up when people mistreat us and seek support when we experience mental health problems.

Power with is when we join with others to be stronger together.

- We can work together to address mental health problems in our schools.
- Both teachers and learners can form support groups to talk about mental health problems, encourage each other and take action.

Power as is the power that comes with certain positions, roles and responsibilities in life.

- Teachers have “power as” teachers to guide students.
- Teachers can use this power to provide the first response to a child in their class experiencing mental health problems.
- They can talk to the child, find out the cause of the problem and take action; this may include inviting the parents or guardians to the school to find a solution.
- Prefects can use their power to talk to the school administration about the challenges affecting learners’ mental well-being.

Power over is when someone abuses their power to mistreat or control someone else, either physically or emotionally.

- Power over causes others to experience mental health problems; for example, if we use violence against, discriminate against or shame those with mental health problems, we only make it worse.

Exercise

1. Explain that in the same way there is electricity in meters, there is also energy in our bodies. Sometimes it is high, sometimes it is low, and sometimes it is in between. Demonstrate in a funny, exaggerated way how it might look if you had different amounts of energy in your body.
2. Invite them to take a moment to notice how much energy they have in their body right now. Say that on the count of 3, everyone should show their energy at the same time. Invite them to notice how much energy there is in the room. Then, count to 3.
3. Explain that the key is to listen, acknowledge and accept all feelings; you don't need to agree with or understand the feeling in order to be supportive and empathetic. If there is time, ask questions that invite sharing and exploration.

Discussion questions

1. What is power?
2. How does one's experiences of power affect their mental well-being?
3. How can teachers and learners use the different types of power to promote mental well-being among learners in schools?

End the discussion by emphasizing that:

- Teachers have the power to help learners and others with mental health problems.
- Misuse of power leads to violence, which worsens mental health problems.
- Schools should encourage the positive use of power to build resilience among learners and teachers to enable them to handle mental health challenges.



Suggested activities for exploring power and mental health



1. **Hold cartoon booklet discussions** in classrooms using the *How Do You Use Your Power?* and *Are You Taking Care of Your Mental Health?* booklets. Booklet clubs or reading clubs provide learners with an opportunity to individually interact with the messages and hold discussions among themselves.
2. **Have the Teacher Protagonist facilitate a 5 minute discussion with learners on resilience** using the following guide:
 - a. **What Is Resilience?**
 - Teacher protagonist or Good School Committee members facilitate a five-minute activity to help students understand what we mean by “resilience”
 - Create small groups of two or three students each, and give each group a rubber band.
 - Invite the groups to play with their rubber band, stretching and pulling it and then checking whether it can (or can’t!) return to its original shape. Take care that no one shoots the rubber band at a classmate!

Note: If rubber bands are not available, you can also use your imagination for this activity!
 - b. Ask the group to reflect on this activity. Consider the following questions:
 - When you stretched or put tension on the rubber band, what happened?
 - In real life, when you feel stretched or under tension, what usually happens?
 - Is there anything we can learn from these rubber bands?
 - c. Explain:
 - Some rubber bands are thin or weak and break when under pressure. However, others are strong and can “bounce back” to their original shape.
 - In life, all of us will meet situations or challenges that will stretch us or put us under tension like a rubber band! The good news is that we can strengthen our ability to withstand this pulling.
 - Resilience is the ability to handle the ups and downs of life.



Expected outcomes

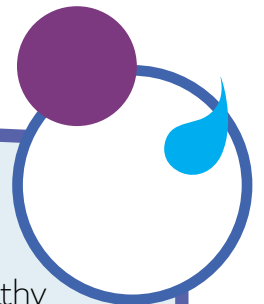
- Teachers and learners will understand and use their power for everyone's mental well-being.
- Teachers and learners will use their power to support others experiencing mental health problems.





Discussion Session 5: Creating an enabling environment for everyone's mental well-being

Estimated time: 60 minutes



Objective

To discuss what the school can do to create a safe and healthy environment that allows the learners and teachers to experience good mental health.

Materials

Cartoon booklet: *Are You Taking Care of Your Mental Health?*

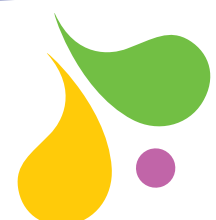
Cartoon booklet: *What is a Good Learning Environment?*

Cartoon poster: *A Good School has a Good Learning Environment.*

Facilitator preparations

Read the prior reading notes for the facilitator on the following pages to enable you to hold a successful discussion.

Do any of the following to bring the group together, build trust and create a safe space: sing a fun local song, play a quick icebreaker, dance to a popular song, take three deep breaths together or invite someone to say a prayer.





Prior reading notes for the facilitator

How the learning environment affect learners' experience of mental health

We know there is a relationship between violence and mental health. When people experience violence both children and adults they may experience mental health problems as a result. Evidence also shows that learners with mental health problems may be more likely to experience violence.

A school with a good learning environment that cares for the mental well-being of its learners and ensures zero tolerance for all forms of violence against children.

Sadly, most times, instead of receiving the support they need, learners instead experience further violence, and the cycle continues.

Here are some suggestions of what schools can do to create a safe and enabling environment that will protect the mental health of all learners.

- Prohibit the use of corporal punishment and adopt positive discipline alternatives.
 - Encourage learners instead of instilling fear in them.
 - Develop policies/guidelines that protect children from all forms of abuse.
 - Promote the mental well-being of learners and teachers (for example, encouraging sports/ activities, allowing adequate time for rest and having designated teachers who students can share their problems with).
 - Promote voice and agency for learners through, for example, allowing them to elect their own leaders, involving them in decision-making processes, holding class meetings, encouraging participation through clubs and providing a suggestion box for learners to raise concerns.
 - Ensure equal/fair treatment for all learners girls and boys including, for example, children with physical disabilities, with learning age disabilities and of different economic backgrounds.
 - Pay attention to the mental well-being of teachers (for example, by holding regular meetings to understand and address their needs, give them a listening ear and reward/recognize them for their contribution).
 - Train staff on basic skills for supporting children with mental health problems.
 - Ensure learners have access to counseling services (for example, through a trained teacher, school nurse or location in the community where you can refer children with mental health problems).
1. **Create guidelines that promote children's safety**, such as zero tolerance for all forms of corporal punishment, zero tolerance for all forms of bullying and zero tolerance for all forms of sexual harassment.
 2. **Ensure that all children can participate in co-curricular activities** like physical education and music, dance and drama; learners in higher or candidate classes should not be exempt from these activities.
 3. **Create safe opportunities for voice and expression** within the school where children can feel free to express their challenges (for example, a suggestion box).



Exercise

1. Invite the group to sit comfortably on their chairs with their feet on the ground.
2. Ask the group to look around their environment and notice various objects.
3. Ask them to focus on a particular object for about five minutes and notice as many details as possible about this object.
4. Have two volunteers share about their experience of focusing on the object.
5. End the activity by saying, "When we focus on our learning environment, we notice the gaps that need improvement."

Discussion questions

Violence and mental health

Scenarios

- An 11-year-old girl in Primary 2 has been experiencing bullying from her peers who feel she is too old for the class. She is afraid to participate in class activities. The teacher asks her to answer a question, but because she is so afraid of being bullied for saying the wrong answer, she keeps quiet. The teacher uses the cane against her for her refusal to answer, and the next day, her peers humiliate her for getting beaten by the teacher.
 - A 14-year-old is experiencing physical violence at home. As a result, he has begun to act aggressively. He does not like going to school and does not listen to anyone. All the teachers in the school think he is being difficult, so he is punished time and again by different teachers. The teachers think he is undisciplined and hope that if they punish him hard enough, he will change. The punishments have instead made his behavior worse because he feels no one understands or cares for him.
 - A female teacher has just delivered a bouncing baby boy. She is excited and looking forward to spending time with her baby during her maternity leave. The school director informs her that she cannot take leave because she is a class teacher of a candidate class, and the national exams are around the corner. She is very disturbed by this realization and is finding it difficult to concentrate on her students while taking care of a little baby. She also feels very tired, irritable and unsettled.
2. What can schools do to create a good learning environment that will protect the learners' and teachers' mental health?
 3. What contribution can learners and teachers make toward creating this enabling environment?

End the discussion by emphasizing that:

- According to the mental health scale, most learners are just about surviving.
- If school becomes a supportive environment, it can prevent them from experiencing severe mental health problems that will have a negative impact on their education.
- By creating an enabling environment, we can promote positive mental health in which the learner and the school excel.



Suggested activities for creating an enabling environment

Expected outcomes

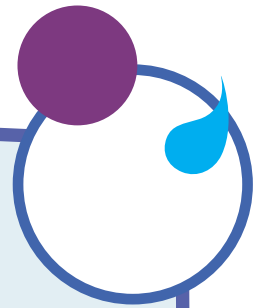
- Schools put in place regular school activities to enhance the mental well-being of learners and teachers.
- There is an increased ability among learners to seek and find support for their mental health needs.
- Schools establish mechanisms for promoting the mental well-being of learners and teachers.





Discussion Session 6: Moving forward

Estimated time: 30 minutes



Objective

To explore how to create and sustain a culture that ensures safety and mental well-being throughout the school.

Facilitator preparations

Do any of the following to bring the group together, build trust and create a safe space: sing a fun local song, play a quick icebreaker, dance to a popular song, take three deep breaths together or invite someone to say a prayer.



Exercise

1. Invite everyone to take a deep breath and notice how they are feeling. Encourage them to notice where in their body they are feeling this emotion and what helps them when they feel like this.
2. Then, go around and invite everyone to share (for example, "I am feeling excited. I feel it in my fingers. When I feel excited, I like to dance and jump around" or "I am feeling nervous. I feel it in my stomach. When I feel nervous, I like to take a few deep breaths and tell myself everything is okay"). When someone says what they do when they feel a certain way, encourage everyone to act it out or mime it.
2. Emphasize that the key is to listen, acknowledge and accept all feelings. You don't need to agree with or understand the feeling to be supportive and empathetic. If there is time, ask questions that invite sharing and exploration.

Discussion questions

1. What practices should we adopt as a school to ensure that we are promoting everyone's mental well-being?
2. How can we integrate and sustain these practices?

End the discussion by emphasizing that:

- Schools need to commit to promoting positive mental health and have strong will in order to sustain it.
- The lessons learned and best practices from this guide need to be integrated into the school program in order to see positive results.
- Regular school activities that naturally contribute to well-being—such as sport, music, art or drama—should be encouraged more.





Suggested activities

1. **Have teachers, school administration and learners brainstorm activities** that they would like to sustain over time and create a mental health action plan that will show how the school will integrate and sustain the promotion of mental health. The plan will include activities to promote mental health, how these will be sustained, the people responsible and referral contacts for support when the need arises.
2. **Make a public declaration about mental health:** This involves the school administration regularly reminding teachers and learners that they care about their mental health and that they should not be afraid to seek support when the need arises.
3. **Reach out to neighboring schools** to encourage them to pick up the idea of mental health.
4. **Integrate at least three mental health activities** into the school program per term or add mental health conversations into other regular school programs, like music, dance and drama; sports; and class and staff meetings.

Expected outcomes

- The school has allocated 1% of its budget to mental health activities as recommended by the Ministry of Education and Sports.
- The school has work plans each term for conducting mental health activities in the school routine.
- The school has established referral points within their community, where they can seek support when the need arises.
- The school is taking advantage of existing support mechanisms (for example, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development's "Buddy" platform).
- The school is implementing the Ministry of Education and Sports' mandatory mental health hour to implement mental health activities.

Final word

Thank you for taking the time to implement the ideas in this guide! We celebrate your efforts and hope that you can sustain the transformation you have experienced to support the mental health and well-being of everyone in your school and community.

Thank you!



Caring for ourselves & others.

CARING FOR OURSELVES & OTHERS.



Self care is....

- taking care of our physical and emotional needs; mind and spirit.
- not a one-time thing, we have to continuously infuse it in our daily lives.
- taking time to "just be" do things that give you pleasure and not feel guilty about it.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR:

- ① BODY
- ② SPACE
 - PHYSICAL
 - DIGITAL
- ③ MIND

Self care is....

is about taking meeting your basic needs of .. nutrition, hygiene, sleep, love etc
is about listening to your body and acknowledging what you can or can't take in
remembering that you are human.. Show kindness to self, forgive self, love self

TAKE CARE OF YOUR:

- ① BODY
- ② SPACE
 - PHYSICAL
 - DIGITAL
- ③ MIND



Is self-care important?

YES! Because...

- Our bodies take care of us and help us experience life, therefore, we need to take care of them as well.
- It helps us better manage our everyday challenges and duties.
- It helps us manage our emotions, stay happy! ☺
- We can better support those we love and care about like our parents and siblings.

Self-care is giving the world the best of you, instead of what's left of you.

Katie Reed

JANINERIPPER.COM

How do we know we are passing our limits?

- Not eating or sleeping well or able to prioritize our daily basic needs
- When we feel unsafe, alone or uncomfortable in our own spaces.
- When we experience changes in our abilities
- When we lose the connection to our work and movement
- When we start to project our emotions on others

Self-care is giving the world the best of you, instead of what's left of you.

Katie Reed

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Have you been practicing self-care?
What are some of the things you do to care for yourself?





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