

# Mental Wellness Basics

## Curriculum Guide

**Recommended Grade Level** 8-10 **Course Length** 4 lessons, approx. 10-15 mins. each **Subject Fit** Health  
**Standards Alignment** National Health Education Standards (NHES); State Academic Health Standards

## Why This Course?

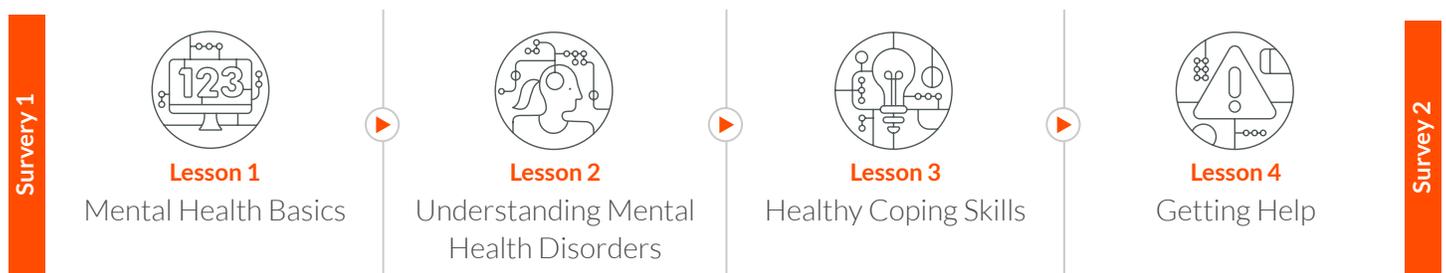
Physical health has been a part of schools' curricula for over 150 years which had led to a positive framing of physical health as it relates to a person's life. Educational institutions are on the cusp of addressing mental health in the same way. Mental wellness is an important part of overall health, but mental health is often misunderstood or mistaken for mental illness. This course fills a need as schools change the way they address the mental health needs of students.

The Mental Wellness Basics course blends evidence informed content with engaging digital activities. By defining what mental wellness is and modeling positive behaviors this online program teaches students the importance of paying attention to their mental health. The course shows the impact of stigma, explores the difference between mental wellness and mental illness, and provides strategies students can use to seek help when necessary.

Four lessons scaffold students' knowledge to build a comprehensive understanding of what mental wellness is and how to achieve it. Interactive scenarios and digital stories allow students to face stressful situations and manage their mental health effectively while learning how to identify warning signs and how to get help for yourself and for others.

Each lesson contains a pre- and post-assessment to measure knowledge gain throughout. Additionally, students complete a survey at the start and end of the course, to evaluate attitudinal and behavioral change.

## Topic Areas



The online lessons are accompanied by robust offline lesson plans and discussion guides to extend the concepts, skills, and strategies learned in the online course

# Detailed Course Outline:

## Lesson 1: Mental Health Basics

Students are introduced to the course, take Survey 1, and learn what mental wellness is, how to strengthen it and protect it from the everyday threats from stress.

### Learning Objectives:

- Define mental health.
- List behaviors and factors that maintain and contribute to positive mental health.
- Define stress and explain how it interacts with mental health.
- List behaviors and factors that threaten positive mental health.

Activity Topic	Activity Description
What is Mental Wellness?	Students are introduced to the course through a video of a peer answering the question of: What is mental wellness? This is followed by a definition of mental health.
Reflection	Students reflect on the words and phrases that they associate with mental wellness and then categorize them as positive, neutral or negative.
Six functions of the Brain	Students will learn how the brain works and affects and shapes a person's experience. These functions also inform how mental health can be affected and supported.
What is Stress?	Students learn about good and bad stress and their effects on physical and mental health.
Foundations of Mental Wellness	Students explore four foundations that contribute to positive mental wellness which are mindset, relationships, habits, and emotions. Students learn how they help with mental health and how to attend to them.

## Lesson 2: Understanding Mental Health Disorders

Students learn the difference between mental wellness and mental illness and explore how the brain is impaired in 5 disorders that affect adolescents.

### Learning Objectives:

- Identify warning signs of a mental disorder.
- Explain how the functions of the brain affect the emotional, intellectual, and behavioral actions of a person.
- Identify when mental health is out of balance and steps to take to achieve balance.
- Identify the symptoms and treatments of 5 common mental disorders affecting adolescents.

Activity Topic	Activity Description
Introduction	Students learn how mental illness has affected a student by watching a testimonial video.
Reflection	Students reflect on how well they can sympathize with someone dealing with a mental health disorder.
Student Stories	Students listen to three student stories and reflect on how the severity of mental disorder symptoms can impact people differently.
Explore the Brain	Students become familiar with the amygdala, hippocampus, prefrontal cortex, and neurotransmitters and the roles that they play in maintaining positive brain functioning and mental wellness.
Maintaining Balance	Students explore how to recognize when thoughts, behaviors or emotions are not in balance and what to do if they are not.
Mental Disorders	Students explore the symptoms and treatments of five of the most common mental health disorders affecting teenagers in the United States and Canada (anxiety, depression, substance abuse, eating disorders and bipolar disorders).

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## Lesson 3: Healthy Coping Skills

Students learn what coping strategies are and how they can be used to deal with life's challenges and support mental health. Students also have the option to practice five coping strategies.

### Learning Objectives

- Identify emotional, intellectual, physical and social factors that can support or impact mental health.
- Explain how coping strategies can impact mental health.
- Identify how negative self-talk can impact mental health.
- Identify appropriate coping strategies to use to best enhance mental health.
- Increase awareness of coping strategies and ability to apply them effectively.

Activity Topic	Activity Description
Introduction	Students learn how coping with life's challenges has affected a student by watching a testimonial video.
Reflection	Students reflect on their own coping strategies and whether they would know that they are working.
Thoughts, Behaviors, Emotions Cycle	Students are introduced to the connectedness of thoughts, behaviors and emotions and how they affect each other and mental wellness.
Negative Thoughts	Students learn five types of negative thought patterns that can affect mental wellness: "all-or-nothing" thinking, fortune telling, catastrophizing, personalization and mental filtering.
Interrupting Negative Cycles	Students learn that interrupting negative cycles of thoughts, behaviors and emotions is not only possible but necessary for maintaining positive mental health.
Exploring Coping Strategies	Students explore coping strategies and choose which ones they would like to try. Coping strategies include: reframing of thoughts, breathing mindfully, muscle relaxation techniques, journaling prompts and naming of emotions.
Application and Practice of Strategies	Students analyze three scenarios to determine which coping strategies would work in each situation. Students also have the optional choice to practice each one.

## Lesson 4: Getting Help

Mental health is like physical health in that there are habits and actions that can positively contribute to a general state of well being. But sometimes professional help is needed. This lesson teaches how to recognize when help is needed and how to access it for oneself and to encourage others to seek help when needed. It also addresses stigma and how it can hinder help-seeking behaviors.

### Learning Objectives:

- Identify observable and non-observable warning signs of a mental health disorder.
- Identify how stigma prevents people from seeking support for mental health issues.
- List five ways to combat stigma of mental health issues.
- Describe consequences of not seeking help for mental health issues.
- List three steps to use in supporting a peer who may be struggling with a mental health condition.
- Identify treatment options for people with mental health disorders.
- Identify warning signs of suicide and steps to support others when present.

Activity Topic	Activity Description
Introduction	Students learn how seeking help can positively affect someone by watching a testimonial video.
Reflection	Students reflect on their own ability to recognize when professional help would be needed to treat mental health disorders.
Observable Warning Signs	Students learn warning signs that indicate the presence of a mental health disorder and then apply this knowledge by identifying them in three accompanying scenarios.
Non-Observable Warning Signs	Students explore hidden warning signs by seeing how posts on social media may not be indicating exactly how someone is feeling inside.
Stigma	Students learn what stigma is and how it can inhibit people from seeking help.
Showing Support and Fighting Stigma	Students apply their knowledge of how to fight stigma by responding to five scenarios and practicing how they would approach each one.
Treatment Options	Students explore treatment options that can help at various levels of severity of disorders.
Suicide	Students learn the risk factors, warning signs and prevention interventions that can be followed when dealing with thoughts of suicide or a peer who is exhibiting thoughts of suicide.

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