



# **STIGMA-FREE TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOLS**

*Creating Cultures of Wellness in all the Places Where People Live,  
Work, Learn, and Play*

"Even on our darkest days, we aren't alone. There is always a ray of hope shining down on us."

**Lilya, 10<sup>th</sup> grader, Fort Lee High School**

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## Stigma-Free Initiative

The Bergen County Stigma-Free Initiative is a county-wide program that:

- Works to prevent and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness.
- Raises awareness of the disease of mental illness through education.
- Aims to create cultures of emotional wellness in all of the places where people live, learn, work and play in Bergen County.
- Fosters environments of acceptance of the one in five of us who has a mental illness.
- Helps make conversations about mental health a part of everyday discussions.
- Eliminates and prevents stigma to encourage those who live with a mental illness to seek assistance without the fear of being negatively judged.
- Teaches people of all ages about suicide and provides resources that could help save a life.



### How and when did the Bergen County Stigma-Free Initiative begin?

In June 2013, Bergen County's Mental Health Board heard a presentation regarding Paramus's plans to designate the town as a Stigma-Free Zone. Paramus was the first Bergen County town to become Stigma-Free. The County's Mental Health Board supported the effort and initiated plans to bring it county-wide. Late in 2018, all 70 Bergen County municipalities adopted formal resolutions establishing their towns as Stigma-Free Zones. In addition, several community groups and schools have done the same (see the sample school stigma free resolution on page 5).



## **How exactly does Bergen County and the Bergen County Division of Mental Health Services promote the Stigma-Free Initiative?**

The mission of the Division of Mental Health Services is to raise awareness that mental illness is a disease, not a choice. All aspects of the Division have engrained eliminating the stigma associated with the disease into its work.

Addressing public health issues, like mental illness, takes a collaborative approach towards wellness. The Stigma-Free Initiative has been embraced by the Department of Health Services along with the County Executive, County Commissioners and leaders within County government, who continue to promote and support its effectiveness.

On the county-level, the Division of Mental Health Services is leading the effort to assist and to guide our 70 towns in bringing Stigma Free to life in a meaningful way.

Eliminating stigma is inextricably linked to raising awareness of the disease of mental illness and how the disease affects our family members, neighbors, colleagues and fellow residents. Towards that end, the county created a Mental Health First Aid Training Corp and offers Mental Health First Aid Training to community organizations and residents.

County dollars support and enhance mental health programs and treatment options for all Bergen County residents, regardless of age. The dollars help assure that a robust array of services are accessible to residents, such as mental health and addiction clinics for the under/un-insured. As the Stigma-Free Initiative continues to gain momentum, it is imperative that residents who need care have access to it.

## **What are the next steps?**

***Bringing the initiative to life in meaningful and lasting ways in all of the places people live, learn, play and work here in Bergen County.***

We must work together to create programs, community forums and raise awareness of resources so no resident or his/her/their family feel hopeless or alone. The disease of mental illness has the potential to worsen, just like most all other illnesses, if left untreated. Preventable complications may arise when individuals do not seek help. It is essential that residents engage in care as soon as need is identified so that recovery can begin, hope is inspired and tragedies are avoided.

Who is involved? **Everyone needs to be involved.** We should all be mindful of our mental health. This county-wide initiative includes all Bergen County residents, young and old. From students to parents to coaches to custodial staff to school administrators and spiritual leaders, every member of your community is a key stakeholder. All stakeholders need to be ambassadors of change in order for Bergen County to truly become Stigma-Free.



James J. Tedesco III  
*Bergen County Executive*  
and the Board of Commissioners

**SAMPLE RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING SCHOOL DISTRICT AS A  
STIGMA FREE ZONE  
FOR MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS**

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Education of \_\_\_\_\_  
is committed to establishing the district as a Stigma-Free Zone supporting efforts for Mental  
Health Awareness; and

**WHEREAS**, the National Institute of Mental Health reports that the number of adults with any  
diagnosable mental disorder within the past year is nearly one in five or roughly 43 million  
Americans, and

**WHEREAS**, one in five children age 13 to 18 have or will have a mental illness; suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup>  
leading cause of death for ages 10 to 24; every day in the United States over 5,240 students in  
grades 7 – 12 attempt suicide; and four out of five have given clear warning signs; and

**WHEREAS**, the stigma associated with the disease of mental illness is identified as the primary  
reason individuals fail to seek the help they need to recover from disease; and

**WHEREAS**, when severe mental illness goes untreated or under-treated, it can lead to alcohol  
or substance abuse, dropping out of school, unemployment, homelessness, or suicide; and

**WHEREAS**, raising awareness of mental illness is an effective way to reduce the stigma  
associated with the disease and encourage those who are affected to seek services and  
support; and

**WHEREAS**, \_\_\_\_\_ School District is committed to  
creating public interest and open dialogue about stigmas, raise awareness of the disease of  
mental illness and create a culture wherein residents who have the disease of mental illness  
feel supported by the community and feel free to seek treatment for the disease without fear  
of a stigma, so recovery can begin; and

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, the \_\_\_\_\_ School  
District in County of \_\_\_\_\_, State of New Jersey, is hereby designated as a  
Stigma-Free Zone.



This edition of the Stigma-Free Tool Kit has been specially designed for school communities. Please use the ideas from this kit to help lead the way for your staff and students to create stigma-free cultures of wellness.

## **Wise words from local students:**

Mental health education is just as important if not more significant than Sex Ed, Driver's Ed, or even just normal school education. It is a very serious topic that deserves much more attention than it currently receives.

### **Henry – 11<sup>th</sup> grader, Fort Lee High School**

The importance of conversations with our mental health. If we don't talk to people about anything our mental health won't be good. You need to talk to people or else you could explode! (just a little humor) I think mindful minutes are good because just one minute could make you feel happier, better about yourself or more relaxed. I think that the wellness room is very helpful because I have needed it once. Talking and coloring with one of my teachers and having relaxing satisfying things in there were really helpful to me. It helped me a lot!

### **Anonymous – 12-year old, Ho-Ho-Kus School**

First, I think parents should learn to be open about mental health and therapy (if they aren't already). Telling someone about your mental state is really hard. In many cases, the fear of being judged or neglected, causes us to keep these feelings bottled up. However if the parent takes the first initiative, the child may open up (even if they open up, at least they know someone is there to talk to them). I also know, that there are many parents who feel that therapy is a waste of time and money and they reflect this opinion onto their children. By doing this they make the child feel like their mental illness is wrong and they should push it away since it is not welcome in their household. By educating more people, homes will gradually become more and more stigma free.

### **Anonymous – 8<sup>th</sup> grader River Dell Middle School**



Conversations regarding mental health can be so important to someone who is battling mental illness. I think that by normalizing conversations about mental health, we can effectively destigmatize mental illness, which can result in more people being open about their issues. By having more conversations about mental health, we can help those who are scared to come forward about their battles and get them help if needed. It is so important to be able to talk freely about mental health without being judged; so I think it is something we should incorporate into school curriculum.

**Silvia – 17-year old, River Dell Regional High School**

People often speak about physical health, while mental health holds just as much importance, if not even more. The lessening of stigma around mental health begins with the initiatives schools take to educate about it. These initiatives are truly necessary and appreciated, as they will have a lasting impact.

**Michaela – 10<sup>th</sup> grader, Fort Lee High School**

I believe that it is extremely important to talk about mental health and have important conversations regarding mental health. One of the reasons why I believe that it is very important to talk about mental health is because for people who have mental health problems, who are not able to talk about them that aspect can be one of the worst parts of the illness. That is why getting people to talk about mental health can improve relationships, improve recovery and take the shame out of something that affects all of us. Talking about mental health, in general, will also encourage the healthy emotional, social, and behavioral growth of more students. I also think that the wellness initiatives at HHK are great. I think this because the wellness room located in the back of the auditorium is a great place for students to take a break and have conversations about their own mental health. I also think that mindful minutes are a great way to be calm and ready for the class. It lets you be ready and focus on what you have to do in that class. Overall, I believe that talking about mental health is very important and that HHK's wellness activities and initiatives are spectacular!

**Anonymous – 12-year old, Ho-Ho-Kus School**



## Thoughts from Bergen County Colleagues

"Recently, a study published in the Washington Post named students at high achieving schools as "At Risk." Suicide rates for adolescents have tripled, and one in four people will have a diagnosable anxiety disorder in their lifetimes. These concerning facts implore educators to review their educational programs and to make the necessary changes to meet the rising needs of their middle school students. At Eisenhower Middle School, we strive to be proactive rather than reactive in combating the growing mental health crisis that is impacting adolescents. It is our hope that by teaching students how to self-regulate their emotions and to embrace deescalating strategies when they are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and anxious will provide future generations with a new and necessary skills set that will hopefully promote a sense of positive mental health well-being. Our school community has worked together in developing a Wellness Plan that focuses on increasing mindfulness and meditation strategies through coursework; constructing a dedicated space to provide student interventions and teaching coping strategies; revising technology policies and procedures to ensure students regularly engaged in face-to-face interactions during the school day and evaluating our cultural procedures such as student recognitions, traditional grading practices, and homework policies ensuring that they align to the goal of fostering a climate of positive mental health. Each Wednesday our staff can be found on our live television program sharing wellness strategies through our Wellness Wednesday feature that appears on our ETV YouTube Channel. Now more than ever, schools will be relied on to make positive mental health a mandated area of focus in their instructional programs."

**Christopher Iasiello, Principal, Eisenhower Middle School – Wyckoff Public Schools**

"The North Arlington Public School District, in coordination with the borough, takes deep pride in upholding the Bergen County Stigma-Free Initiative. By creating a Stigma-Free Task Force composed of numerous community members, we were able to see mental health through the diverse lenses of each individual's experience. It is with this wonderful tapestry of stakeholders that we created the foundation needed to truly unlock the meaning of being Stigma-Free.

The Stigma-Free Initiative has changed the dialogue around mental health for all of us, in and outside of our school buildings. The way we share stories, experiences and resources has blossomed into a growing understanding that we continuously foster. We recognize that mental health research and support will evolve over time; with that evolution, we will constantly learn how to best serve our community, our loved ones and ourselves in new ways. To us, the Stigma-Free Initiative is a movement of people, and the Stigma-Free Tool Kit is a pivotal step in a journey worth taking together."

**Samantha Rodriguez, Supervisor of Curriculum & Instruction (9-12), North Arlington Public Schools**



## Administratively

1. **Certify Staff as Youth Mental Health First Aiders** – Becoming certified as a Youth Mental Health First Aider will increase your staffs' knowledge of mental health issues, signs and symptoms in young people and their comfort level in discussing the subject matter and assisting a student in need.
2. **Homework free night(s)/weekends** – Everyone, including the staff could use a little more unstructured time. Find a day or weekend where EVERYONE takes off. Post some fun ideas for the free time – cook a meal with your parents, play a board game, watch a movie together you all enjoy, have a game of catch, fish at the local pond, ride bikes and have a picnic, etc.
3. **Create wellness opportunities for staff** – Have posters/materials available in the staff lounge that promote Progressive Muscular Relaxation, meditation, or breathing exercises. Start a staff meeting off with a few minutes of stretching or an array of snacks that promote well-being (that does include dark chocolate ☺). Remind staff of the resources available to them should they be experiencing an issue (professional co-workers, EAP, general healthcare provider).
4. **Remind staff that they ARE and CAN be HUMAN** – We all have bad/off days, family stresses, etc. Promoting an environment in which adults feel comfortable saying, “I am a little grumpy, I need a little extra care, I am going to put off this important lesson until tomorrow when I am more myself and let’s do X instead”, will open the line of communication for the students to speak about how they are feeling when needed.
5. **Establish a Parent Academy** – Whether it be monthly, quarterly, or only once a year – create, plan and promote parent/community programs that support a culture of whole body and mind wellness. This could be a movie screening, a conversation with a local mental health professional, a student panel (former or current) discussing issues that concern them, a talk on a relevant topic (screen time, school violence, substance use, etc.) Where applicable, record the evening and post on the school web site for those who could not attend.
6. **Explore Search Institute** – Originally focused on the 40 Developmental Assets, the Search Institute has expanded their research/education to include Relational Assets. Look into both areas of research, how the strategies can enhance growth and make a difference in the life of a young person and those connected to him/her/them. <https://www.search-institute.org/>
7. **Place 2 Be** - <https://www.place2be.org.uk/> Look at an integrated systematic approach supporting students, staff and community, including research on effectiveness.
8. **Be Open to Suggestions** – There is no one right formula and no miracle solution that can be introduced to create environments that will guarantee emotional wellness for all or perfectly support those experiencing mental health issues or a mental illness. Speak to colleagues about ideas they have employed , research, listen to staff, listen to students, try different approaches, bring in different speakers (you never know who will reach someone). Be Consistent. Be Diligent. Remind Everyone He/She/They Matter. BREATHE!!!!!!!!!!



## Curriculum and/or Curriculum Enhancements

1. **For All grade levels** – RULER: supported by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence  
<http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/ruler-overview/>
2. **For Elementary:** Wingman <https://www.dylanswingsofchange.org/>
3. **For Elementary:** Gizmo for Mental Health <https://www.gizmo4mentalhealth.org/>
4. **For Elementary – Middle School:** Second Step <https://www.secondstep.org/second-step-social-emotional-learning>
5. **For Elementary – High School** (program choice dictate grade levels):  
<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>
6. **For Elementary – High School** (apps for students, programs for teachers, parents and students):  
REACHOUT.com <https://au.reachout.com/>
7. **For Elementary – High School** (resources on program ideas and how to start):  
<https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning>
8. **For Elementary – High School** (Digital Based Learning): Everfi <https://everfi.com/partners/k-12-educators/social-emotional-learning/>
9. **For Upper Elementary – High School** (focused on suicide prevention) LifeLines Curriculum:  
<https://www.hazelden.org/web/public/lifelines.page>
10. **For Middle School – High School** : DBT in Schools: Skills Training for Emotional Problem Solving for Adolescents <https://www.amazon.com/DBT%C2%AE-Skills-Schools-STEPS-Intervention/dp/1462525598>
11. **For Middle School – High School:** The Erika’s Lighthouse Program  
<https://www.erikaslighthouse.org/>
12. **For High Schools** –Teen Mental Health First Aid (See pages 9-11)
13. **For Middle School – High School and Transition to Higher Ed:** Seize the Awkward (video and ad campaign plus curricular ideas): <https://seizetheawkward.org/>
14. **For High School and Transition to Higher Ed** – The Jed Foundation (curricular assistance, videos, PSAs and resources <https://www.jedfoundation.org>
15. **Mental Health & High School Curriculum Guide: Understanding Mental Health and Mental Illness** <http://teenmentalhealth.org/>

**Talk to your colleagues – they may have developed something great in house**



## Mental Health Speakers/Presentations

### Ideas:

1. Invite a speaker to the school to discuss their experience with a mental health condition with the students.
2. Allow the students to engage and ask questions to the speaker.
3. Bring interactive presentations that encourage students to embrace their emotions and creative talents.

### Goals:

1. Bring awareness of mental health and stigma to students.
2. Show the students that resiliency and recovery are possible for people with a mental illness.
3. Show students they are not alone in dealing with mental illness or mental health challenges.
4. Illustrate a different approach to learning.
5. Embrace differences that connect to achieve a result.

### Suggestions:

1. Remembering TJ - <https://www.rememberingtj.org/>
2. Mykee Fowlin - <http://mykeefowlin.com/>
3. Minding Your Mind - <https://mindingyourmind.org/>
4. Alumni in Recovery (AIR) - <https://alumniinrecovery.org/>
5. NAMI - <https://www.naminj.org/>
6. Annelise Malgieri - <https://www.facebook.com/Miss-Bergen-County-Annelise-Malgieri-No-Mind-Left-Behind-310309719377258/>
7. Story Pirates - <https://www.storypirates.com/>
8. [Healthbarnusa.com](http://Healthbarnusa.com) (make the mind body connection)
9. John Morello – *Dirt* <https://www.johnmorello.com/the-shows>
10. TEEN Truth <https://teentruth.net/>
11. Kate MacHugh (author/speaker/MSW)
12. Attitudes in Reverse (AIR) - <https://air.ngo/>
13. Reborn - <http://www.reborn.social/#/>
14. Dr. Julia Garcia - <https://drjuliagarcia.com/>



## Mental Health First Aid

The Bergen County Mental Health First Aid Training Corps (BCMHFAT) was formed when Bergen County launched the first county-wide Stigma-Free Initiative in 2013. From the onset of the initiative, county leaders in the Division of Mental Health Services recognized that stigma could not be eliminated unless education about mental illness was provided to residents.

Mental Health First Aid Training is just like basic first aid or CPR training except it teaches participants about the actions they can take and words they can use to assist someone who needs help due to a mental health challenge. One in five people, of all ages from youth through the most mature adults, will experience a mental challenge in their lifetime. However, the majority of us do not know what to say or do to help someone in need of mental health support, so, sadly, no action is typically taken and the person's suffering continues. The BCMHFAT Corps members work to help stop the inaction and inspire people to help others in need with compassion, kindness and resources.

Since 2014, the Bergen County Mental Health First Aid Training Corps has trained more than 3,000 adults to be Mental Health First Aiders. Those people engaged with co-workers, community members, family, neighbors and strangers in this interactive inspirational public education course. Sharing the knowledge and keeping discussions about mental health a part of everyday conversations will help to eliminate stigma and ultimately, prevent it from ever forming allowing those in need of assistance to reach out confidently.

In Spring 2019, the Bergen County Division of Mental Health, the umbrella of the BCMHFAT Corps, responded to an opportunity to be designated as a Teen MHFA (tMHFA) pilot site. The tMHFA pilot aimed to directly educate teens about mental health challenges and the signs and symptoms they might see. The multi-lesson course designed for 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (15-18 year olds) was developed in response to the increased number of mental health issues and the rising suicide rate among the adolescent population and adolescents' natural tendency to confide in and to take guidance from peers. In June 2019, BC was proudly designated one of the 36 National teen MHFA pilot sites with our collaborative partner, the Fort Lee School District.

The BCMHFAT Corps members and Corps Coordinator remain active and dedicated to eliminating stigma and increasing awareness of mental health. The Corps Coordinator has developed an outstanding knowledge of the steps needed to engage in local and national MHFA initiatives. The Corps Coordinator can serve as a local resource expert here in BC and beyond to help your school district become active in the MHFA movement.



James J. Tedesco III  
Bergen County Executive  
and the Board of Commissioners



**1 in 5**  
teens has had  
a serious **mental  
health disorder**  
at some point  
in their life.

**50%**  
of all **mental  
illnesses** begin  
by age 14, and  
**75%**  
by the mid-20s.

Suicide is the  
**second leading  
cause of death** for  
**15- to 24-**  
year-olds.

NATIONAL COUNCIL  
FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

## Why **teen** Mental Health First Aid?

teen Mental Health First Aid teaches high school students **how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders among their friends and peers**. The training gives students the skills to have supportive conversations with their friends and get a responsible and trusted adult to take over as necessary. It is designed to be delivered in schools or community sites in three interactive classroom sessions of 90 minutes each or six sessions of 45 minutes each.

Schools and organizations offering the training are required to train at least 10 percent of adult staff in Youth Mental Health First Aid and to train the entire grade level. A critical step in the teen Mental Health First Aid action plan is connecting with a trusted adult. Youth Mental Health First Aid trains adults to be prepared to help young people facing a crisis.

### WHAT IT COVERS

- Common signs and symptoms of mental illness.
- Common signs and symptoms of substance use.
- Common signs and symptoms of a mental health crisis, particularly suicide.
- How to open the conversation about mental illnesses and addiction with friends.
- The impact of school violence and bullying on mental health.
- How to seek the help of a responsible and trusted adult.

### WHO SHOULD TAKE IT

- High school students in grades 10, 11 and 12
- High schools, organizations partnering with a high school and youth-serving organizations are eligible to teach teen MHFA to students.

### The course will teach students how to apply the teen MHFA Action Plan to help a friend:

- Look for warning signs.
- Ask how they are.
- Listen up.
- Help them connect with an adult.
- Your friendship is important.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT TEEN MHFA, VISIT [MHFA.org/teens](https://www.mhfa.org/teens).



MENTAL  
HEALTH  
FIRST AID

**"Schools offering this training can save lives, families and communities. Regardless of how happy, smart or popular someone seems on the outside, everyone is fighting battles we have no idea about. tMHFA taught me that sometimes we need a reminder of what is important and the tools to make that a priority."**  
— **Katie Ramboyoung**, *teen Mental Health First Aider*

BORN THIS WAY/  
FOUNDATION



James J. Tedesco III  
Bergen County Executive  
and the Board of Commissioners

## teen Mental Health First Aid Course Outline



Mental Health and  
Mental Health  
Challenges

Impact of Mental  
Health  
Challenges

Professionals  
who can help  
and types of  
help

Your role as a  
tMHFA First  
Aider

Learning the  
tMHFA Action  
Plan

Using the action plan  
to help a friend  
experiencing a crisis

Using the action plan to help a  
friend experiencing a mental  
health challenge

School, community  
and national  
resources



## Kindness Day

### Ideas:

1. Have students write positive notes for each other and place them on lockers.
2. Set up student-run activities throughout the day. (Ex: “thank you note station” have a table run by students that has art supplies so other students can write thank you notes to teachers, students, faculty, etc.)
3. Create a bulletin board where students can post sticky-notes of acts of kindness they have witnessed throughout the school.
4. Create a “Kindness Rocks” garden. Have students decorate rocks with positive messages of kindness and place them in a designated garden or next to a walkway outside so passersby can see.
5. Similar to Elf on the Shelf, designate an object to be the Kindness bear/seahorse/sloth. The Kindness mascot has new messages every day with kind tasks for the students to complete. For example, “bring in canned goods for the local pantry”, “compliment the person sitting next to you”, or “pick up the trash you see around the school’s property”.
6. Host a “Good Deeds-A-Thon” where instead of pledging laps walked or minutes read, students pledge acts of kindness.

<https://www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-articles/article/8862-awesome-ways-to-encourage-being-kind-at-school>

### Goals:

1. Show students the impact simple acts of kindness can have on a person.
2. Make kindness a part of the school environment.
3. Show students how it feels to be kind to people rather than judgmental.
4. Diminishes stress levels and infuses joy in the school environment.
5. Shifts the school culture to one which not only fosters kindness, but establishes a sense of collective connectedness.



## Stigma-Free Club

### Ideas:

1. Create a Stigma-Free club in school distinct from the town committee but work in concert when desired.
2. The club can meet and discuss ideas for events within the school and community to help promote the Stigma-Free initiative.

### Goals:

1. Educate students and staff on what the Stigma-Free initiative is.
2. Promote the Stigma-Free initiative within the schools and communities from student perspective/priority.
3. Create a safe space for students with mental illnesses or those living with someone with a mental illness, those struggling with a mental health issue or those living with someone with a mental illness.
4. Empower youth to plan and create activities that they view as helpful for themselves and their peers.

### Suggestions:

1. Stigma-Free fair – have local mental health resources set up tables so students can learn more about them. Include fun activities for younger students to learn about mental health. Use a scavenger hunt format to encourage students to visit the resource tables.
2. Walk-a-Thon (Ramsey)
3. Lime Out (Ramapo & Indian Hills High School)
4. Bathroom signs with information
5. Daily affirmations/inspirational quotes (announcements/email)
6. Stigma-Free Pledge



## Mental Health Books

### Ideas:

1. Have books featuring character(s) with mental health issues in the classroom and choose some for classroom reading.
2. Assign books about mental health for students to read.
3. Even if a book is not focused on mental health, if the character(s) experience something that could affect one's well-being, take a moment to acknowledge and brainstorm strategies that could help that character, that encourage problem-solving skills, or highlight resources in the book/life.

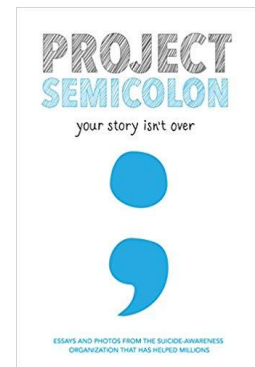
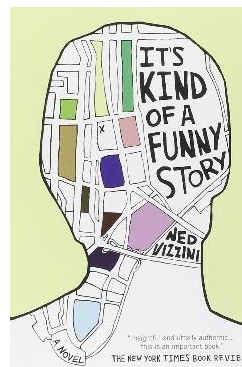
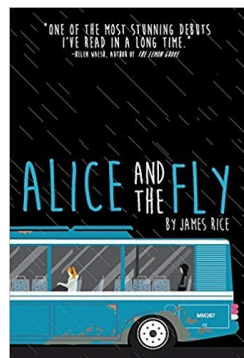
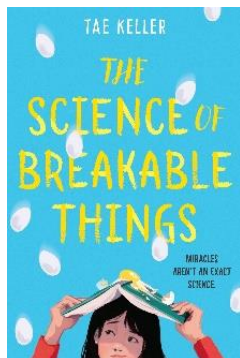
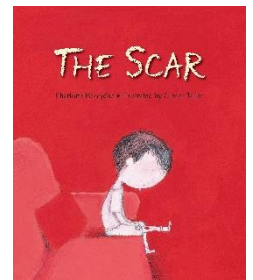
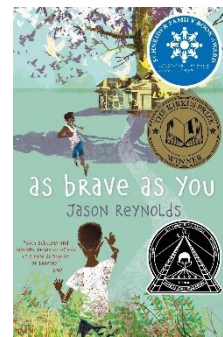
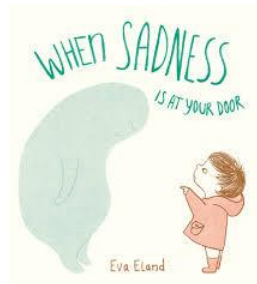
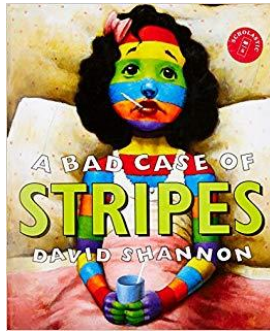
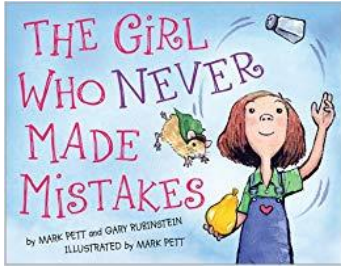
### Goals:

1. Teach younger students what mental health is and what it can look like and feel like.
2. Help students identify themselves, a friend, or a loved one who may be struggling in some way.
3. Teach students that mental health conditions are common.
4. Help students recognize that they are not alone if they have a mental illness or a mental health challenge.
5. Teach older students how to recognize signs and symptoms of a mental health condition and where to access help.
6. Create conversations in the classroom about mental health.



James J. Tedesco III  
Bergen County Executive  
and the Board of Commissioners

## Suggestions:



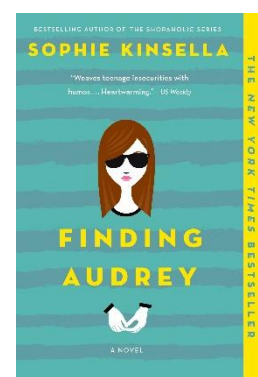
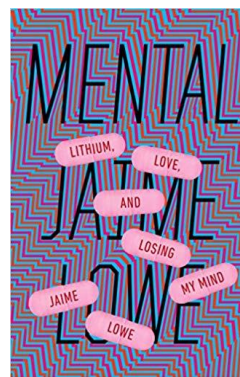
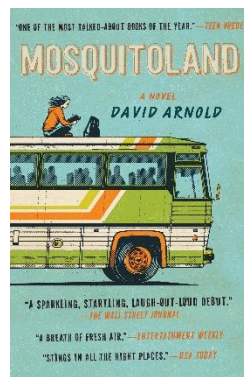
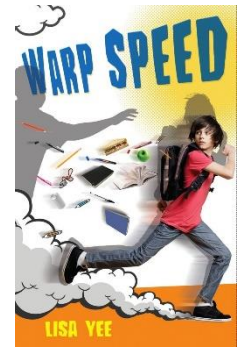
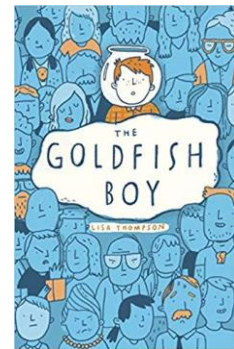
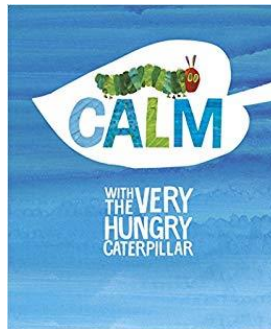
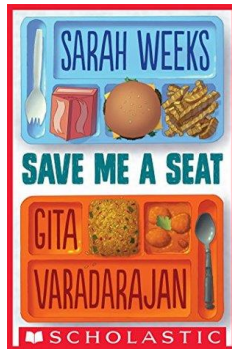
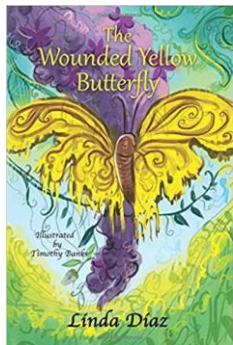
## Books Pictured:

1. *The Girl who Never Made Mistakes* by Mark Pett & Gary Rubinstein (K-3)
2. *A Bad Case of Stripes* by David Shannon (K-3)
3. *When Sadness is at Your Door* by Eva Eland (K-3)
4. *As Brave as You* by Jason Reynolds (4-8)
5. *The Scar* by Charlotte Moundlic (4-8)
6. *The Science of Breakable Things* by Tae Keller (4-8)
7. *Alice and the Fly* by James Rice (YA)
8. *It's Kind of a Funny Story* by Ned Vizzini (YA)
9. *Project Semicolon: Your Story Isn't Over* by Amy Bleuel (YA)



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### More Suggestions:



### Books Pictured:

1. *The Wounded Yellow Butterfly* by Linda Diaz (K-3)
2. *Save Me a Seat* by Sarah Weeks (K-3)
3. *Calm with the Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle (K-3)
4. *The Goldfish Boy* by Lisa Thompson (4-8)
5. *Warp Speed* by Lisa Yee (4-8)
6. *The Last Invisible Boy* by Evan Kuhlman (4-8)
7. *Mosquitoland* by David Arnold (YA)
8. *Mental* by Jaime Lowe (YA)
9. *Finding Audrey* by Sophie Kinsella (YA)



## Stigma-Free Art

### Ideas:

1. Have students create Stigma-Free flags and banners to hang around the school.
2. Have students create a Stigma-Free mural for the school.
3. Have students plant a garden dedicated to the Stigma-Free campaign.
4. Have students create stigma-free posters and bulletin boards.
5. Give students opportunities to express their feelings on stigma-free and mental health through art using a variety of mediums.
6. Create an outdoor labyrinth on your school grounds or utilize smaller options with the same purpose. (see suggestions 2 and 3)

### Goals:

1. Promote the Stigma-Free initiative in schools.
2. Remind students about the Stigma-Free initiative and how it involves everyone.
3. Help students to discover activities that help them maintain emotional balance using art as the vehicle.

### Suggestions:

1. Project Flaunt – see attached
2. <http://theindigoteacher.com/labyrinths-as-a-tool-for-mindfulness/>
3. <https://educationsvoice.wordpress.com/2016/03/26/mindfulness-in-the-classroom-finger-labyrinth-meditation/>
4. <http://www.insideoutproject.net/en>
5. Creative Lunch – know someone who can do origami, hand crochets or has some other fun, creative talent? Invite that person in to demonstrate and oversee some lunchtime “decompress.” Want something less structured? Print out some mandalas, cut up pieces of decorative paper, leave out blank white paper along with markers, colored pencils, crayons, and glue and just let the students and staff create. Want to sneak in an environmental lesson? Take empty water bottles and encourage the students to decorate with pieces of paper and glue (simple decoupage) and then use them as planters at school or for at home.



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## PROJECT FLAUNT Flaunting visible and invisible differences



*Leaf Me alone, I don't care what you say!*

A big hunk of lettuce. That might confuse you, but let me explain. I have many unique qualities, but this one stands out the most. I am the only member of my family who is vegetarian, and I have been since I was 6. I became vegetarian not for the diet, but because I had a hard time separating the meat on my plate from the dog sitting at my feet. I don't feel that it is something for me to hide, I actually think it's interesting and a great conversation starter. Being vegetarian, I have faced some challenges, but knowing why I made my decision, it has all been worth it.



## Project Flaunt @ River Dell

This school year, River Dell Middle School partnered with a local nonprofit organization, Don't Hide It, Flaunt It (DHIFI) to promote acceptance and tolerance.

In September, Meg Zucker, founder and president of DHIFI, shared her story during an assembly. She was born with a rare condition, ectrodactyly, and both her and her children's experiences inspired her to create the organization. DHIFI Inc. encourages people of all ages to flaunt their own differences and ultimately embrace and celebrate what makes us all unique.

In October, the students considered what made them unique, either visible or invisible, and how that could be represented. Then, their "flaunts" were photographed. Once students received their photograph back, they reflected on their unique trait and how it has shaped them. These reflections were coupled with the photographs to create beautiful visual displays that allowed the students to "flaunt it!"

Students learned to accept their own differences and the differences of others, realizing Meg Zucker's message, that "The things that make me different make me, me."

Providing an opportunity for students to be uninhibited, inspirational and reflective

Advancing acceptance, understanding and creating a positive self-image

Empowering students to accept their differences and the differences of others

Contact Information: [Melissa.Miller@riverdell.org](mailto:Melissa.Miller@riverdell.org) and [Alison.Saffos@riverdell.org](mailto:Alison.Saffos@riverdell.org)



## Mindfulness Room

### Ideas:

1. Create a designated space where students can decompress, regroup, and practice emotional wellness techniques.
2. Host yoga and/or meditation sessions using the designated space.
3. Encourage different student groups to utilize the space for meeting or team building activities.

### Goals:

1. Teach students how to step away from a stressful environment and calm down.
2. Improve students' mood and performance in their classes.
3. Create a new gathering place for students to interact over something that is healthy.
4. Make self-care part of the school day and help students to understand that self-care for emotional wellness is important for everyone.

### Suggestions:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Soft/comfortable furniture                                 | 7. Exercise bike or punching bag/punching pillows (some students need to expend energy to center themselves) |
| 2. Writing wall   | 8. Biofeedback   |
| 3. Art activities/ available art supplies for free expression | 9. Legos   |
| 4. Books  |  |
| 5. Music  |  |
| 6. Yoga/meditation/ breath work information and practice      |  |

Here are some app suggestions that focus on mindfulness and relieving stress and anxiety that can be used for students and/or faculty:

- |                                   |                                  |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Calm                           | 8. Mindfulness for Children      |
| 2. 10% Happier                    | 9. Positive Penguins             |
| 3. Breathe                        | 10. Shine: Calm Anxiety & Stress |
| 4. Headspace (for kids)           | 11. Healing Buddies Comfort Kit  |
| 5. Smiling Mind                   | 12. Virtual Hope Box             |
| 6. Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame |                                  |
| 7. HelloMind                      |                                  |



# BRAIN BREAKS



## Brain Breaks for the Classroom at Every Grade Band

### AUTHOR

Brittany Williamson

I remember growing up with our old computer and unreliable dial-up internet (that my sister would constantly sabotage by picking up the phone to make a call. You can plainly see I'm on the computer, Lindsay!) Whenever there was an issue with that computer, I'd call out for my dad to fix it. His response was always the same, "unplug it, count to ten and plug it back in."

Our brains are a lot like computers, only significantly more valuable. If you want your students to be attentive, stay on task, and (most importantly) encode the information you are giving them into their memory, you have to give their brains regular breaks.

### Why do our brains need breaks?

Much of what your students are doing in class requires the use of their prefrontal cortex (PFC,) the part of the brain responsible for "think-work". It powers goal-orientation, concentration, memory consolidation, logical thinking, executive functioning, AND impulse control. Whew! I'm so exhausted just listing its responsibilities, that I need a break.

If left to run on overload, the PFC will fatigue. If this happens, all the work your students are powering through will be in vain as they struggle to retain new information and/or give a task their best effort.

### So when does this fatigue occur?

That depends on the age and PFC development of the student. For elementary school students, researchers suggest **10-15** concentrated minutes in a task warrants a 2-4-minute break. For middle and high school students, every **20—30** minutes of a concentrated task earns a 5-minute break.



These short breaks don't just repower the brain, they are also beneficial to the physical and emotional health of your students. All of our curricula are different, but they probably have one thing in common: they don't allow for much flexibility in our schedule. It's important to note that short breaks here and there will cost you less time than having to cover loads of information again.

### What are the benefits of brain breaks?

- **Increase productivity:** Hitting pause long enough to give the PFC a reprieve allows it to return to the task with renewed mental resources, increased creativity and motivation to refocus attention.
- **Improved learning:** It's long been known that our bodies use sleep to consolidate memories. A [2009 study](#) found that a simple rest period also allows for the hippocampus to review and ingrain recent knowledge to memory.
- **Movement is magic:** Oxygen is vital to an active brain. 90% of the oxygen in our brain and body is stale until we take a deep breath or get up to move our bodies.
- **Mood perks:** Brain breaks promote stretching, laughing, listening to music, meditation and positively interacting with peers, all of which increase restorative neurotransmitters like dopamine (a.k.a the happiness hormone).

### Brain Break Ideas for Elementary School Students:

- **Animal Role Play:** Have your kiddos pretend to be various animals complete with noises and body movements. Call out a few in sequence.
- **Popular Movement Songs:** Play a song with whole-body movements, such as, "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," "Father Abraham," and "Shake Your Sillies Out". Here's a [link](#) to a few different and fun ones!
- **Simon Says:** It'll always be a classic.

### Brain Break Ideas for Middle School Students:

- **Would You Rather:** Ask "would you rather" questions and have students show their choice by moving to one end of the room or the other. Have a few kids share the reasoning behind their choice.
- **Find It Fast:** Call out a color or other trait (e.g. something round, something yellow, something wooden) and students must find an object in the room and get to it as quickly as possible.



- **Tell a Story:** Pick a student to start a story with one sentence, each student down the row adds an additional sentence to the story. The story ends with the last student. (Make sure to establish rules such as each student has 5-seconds to say a line or they are skipped and the stories must be school appropriate).

### Brain Break Ideas for High School Students:

- **Yoga:** this is a wonderful way to promote mind & body balance and decrease stress. Poses that are fun and challenging for high school students are core strength poses like airplane and eagle pose.
- **Keep It Up:** Students must keep a beach ball from hitting the ground. Add two or three balls to make it even more fun
- **Human Knot Project:** Class forms small circles of 8-10 people. Each student will put their left hand into the circle and grab the hand of another student. Then, they do the same with their right hand. Without letting go, they have to work together to untie the knot.

Brain breaks are beginning to sound like a no-brainer, am I right? I've taken at least three while writing this post.

Which brings me to my last point, and it's an important one. It's fair to say that many of you don't take the breaks you need. Brain breaks are not just for the benefit of your students; they give you those same perks. Implementing these breaks throughout the school day will help you to run a more efficient classroom as you reduce off-task behavior, increase engagement, and create a positive and productive learning environment. As you re-energize the minds of your students, you'll see that your love of teaching is refreshed as well!

*Brittany Williamson is a Mental Health Counselor at Florida Children's Institute based in Jacksonville, Florida. She works closely with children and their families taking a Cognitive-Behavioral approach and is passionate about building emotional intelligence and teaching coping skills that will promote resilience throughout her client's lives. She is also a certified yoga instructor who uses that knowledge to treat anxiety and depression and to model self-care within her practice. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, staying active, traveling, and spending time with her family and beloved yellow Lab, Reagan.*



## teachupsidedown: 50 Brain Breaks to Engage Students in the Classroom

**Author:** Carrie Wisehart

January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Blog: [teachupsidedown](#)

Every teacher knows that “glazed look” students give you after they’ve had to overwork their brains thinking about a difficult subject – or just sitting in their desks for too long. Over the years, I’ve developed many of these brain breaks because I know and understand that students need to “recharge” – especially when we are working on difficult material.

This is just a great list to get you started. I’m sure you’ll come up with more of your own creative ideas – and I would love to hear them! Please comment! Not all of these are “curricular” brain breaks, and for good reason. I make it a point to do at least ONE non-curricular 2-5 minute brain break a day. I find that my students are actually MORE engaged in the process of learning when I do these. For elementary teachers, maybe 2-3 of these are good for your kiddos.

I hope this huge list helps you to “change it up” during class and breathe fresh life into your classroom!

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### 50 Brain Breaks to Engage Students in the Classroom

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**HIVE FIVES – listed below are 5 different high five brain breaks. These are short, simple, and to the point, but my students absolutely love them. They give students time to stand, get the blood pumping back to their brains, and they get to physically move around, which my high schoolers definitely need.**

**Every time I tell them to stand up, they know that a high five is probably shortly around the corner.**

1. Regular high fives – Tell the students they have 30 seconds to high five every person in the room, but they MUST walk. It’s funny watching them try and walk quickly to high five 30 students in 30 seconds.
2. Double high fives – Have students stand. Then tell them to put one hand in the air, then another. Then have them turn and double high five all the students around them.
3. Windmill high fives – Tell students to spread out in the room so they have plenty of room. Then have them stretch both arms out to the sides, once hand facing forward, the other facing backward. Then have them partner up with someone, turning in circles. As they turn, they should be able to high five their partner. This is one of my students’ favorites.
4. High five hugs – When the students high five, they place their thumb around the hand of the other student and tap it a couple times. It’s as if their hands are giving hugs.



5. Student authored high fives – Often I have the students come up with their own versions of high fives. They invent them and show them to me. Then I use them in class at a later time. Students have come up with volleyball high fives, jellyfish high fives, turkey high fives...so many.

**GRATITUDE – Listed below are several gratitude brain breaks. It is statistically proven that if we daily practice gratitude, we are 10% happier. It helps students to stop and take a few minutes to be grateful, and it gives us a short break in the middle of class.**

6. I'm thankful for YOU! HANDOUT – take a few minutes and use the attached handout to allow students to write a short letter to someone they are thankful for.

7. Thankfulness Sharing – Go around the room and have each student share something specific they are thankful for (more than just friends or family – they need to say specific names or items).

8. Thankfulness Post-its – Have students take a post-it note and write down what they are thankful for. Then designate a place in the room where students stick those post-it notes for you to read out loud when you need another brain break!

9. 1,000 Gifts – Ann Voskamp has a blog called <http://www.aholyexperience.com>. At that blog she has lists of daily gratitude prompts for every month. Every day you could put one of those prompts on the board and have students write them in a journal. Then, when you need a brain break, you can have them share their gifts from the journal.

10. Gratitude Graffiti Wall – Put a large piece of paper on your wall, in the hallway, or on the door. During a brain break, have students write their gratitude on the wall. If your students sit at tables, you can put the paper on their tables and have them write them, later hanging the gratitude posters on the wall.

11. UNBIRTHDAY PROJECT (HANDOUTS) – As a teacher of 16 years, I have always had difficulty remembering and celebrating student birthdays. So, a few years ago I started celebrating students' unbirthdays. It is a great brain break once a week – and if I forget, you can be certain the students will remember. In the attached packet are all the handouts you'll need to make this happen and understand what Unbirthdays are. But you can certainly make this your own.



**ENCOURAGEMENT – A great way to develop safety in the environment of your classroom is to have students encourage one another and other teachers. Taking five minutes out of your class time to encourage one another is more valuable than you'll ever know. When students feel encouraged and safe, they are more likely to take risks in their education.**

12. Drive by encouragement – While students are finishing up an assignment quietly, I walk by their desks and put a long 1-2 foot strip of masking tape on their desks. When it is time, we take 5 minutes to do a fun activity. The students write compliments on the masking tape for their fellow students. I make them start with their own table or row (so everyone makes sure to get one). Then after all the compliments are written, they “drive by” and stick the pieces of masking tape on each student. Students end up with 10-20 encouragements. Most of my students keep the tape on their binders or folders and are very encouraged by these notes.

13. Drive by Post-its – Once or twice a semester, I like to take 5 minutes to encourage another colleague, a janitor, a secretary, an administrator, or the lunch ladies. I have students write an encouraging note on a post-it note. Then we take a short five minutes to do a silent drive by. We walk quickly to that person’s door and stick all the post-it notes on it. It’s very important that the students know it is silent. We don’t disturb anyone, but especially for secretaries or colleagues, this is a great encouragement for them.

14. Have a fan-tasch-tic day (HANDOUT) – Small slips of paper used to write encouragement notes to classmates or locker buddies.

15. SIX WORD MEMOIRS (HANDOUT) – Instructions are on the handout. This is a great activity that can be extended or short. You could merely have the students write down a six-word memoir for their day and put it on a post-it or share it with the class. OR – you could do the more extended assignment, but only take 5 minute brain breaks here and there to work on it. If you use technology in the classroom, you can also use Twitter – as there is a Six Word Memoir Twitter page where people can post according to the # prompts given.



**GETTING TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS – I love to use brain breaks to get to know my students and help them get to know one another. Here are some ways to do that:**

16. Handshakes – During a brain break, have students go shake the hands of three students and introduce themselves. You’d be surprised how many students still don’t know one another’s names by a few weeks into the semester, especially in high school.
17. Favorites – Have students stand up and go talk to three different students about a “favorite,” making sure they also know the name of that person. When they all finish, have several students share what they learned out loud with the rest of the class.
18. Cave Time – Have students sit under their desks or table with another student and discuss something from your lesson or a “favorite.” Just the simple act of sitting at another level helps them break up the mundane.
19. What Matters to You? –(HANDOUT) Have students fill out the What Matters to You handout and then, when you need brain breaks, have students get it out and share one thing with the class, their neighbors, or their tables.
20. Show Not Tell – (HANDOUT) Have students fill out the show not tell handout. Then, when you need a brain break, have them partner up and do a charade to help the other student figure out when they were happy or shy or sad.
21. Skittles Interview – (HANDOUT) Have students pick out (according to the instructions on the handout) skittles. Then have them interview one or more students based on the colors they’ve chosen. This can happen all at once or a question at a time, depending on how much of a brain break you need.
22. Check-up Letter – Have the students write a letter to you (you choose the length) as a brain break about once a quarter, letting you know how they are doing in the class, any questions they have, anything you need to know about their out-of-school-life.
23. One Word- Have students give you ONE WORD – for instance, one brain break you could have them give you one word that describes themselves, their families, their outside activities – something that helps you get to know them better.



24. Kindergarten Carpet Time – I use this strategy for book discussions in my classroom, but it’s also nice to change locations and sit on the floor. If you teach elementary school, you already do this. But this has been very successful for me even as a high school teacher. The students are just tired of desks and tables. It’s nice to change locations. And before we discuss the book we often have a “How’s your heart?” discussion as a group. Great way to get to know my students.

25. Post-it Notes – These are my favorite for getting to know kids. When they walk in the door or during class for a brain break, I have them fill out one of these questions and stick it to a place I’ve designated (mine is a board called Post-It Place):

- a. What are you most excited about this weekend?
- b. What exciting thing happened last weekend?
- c. What are you most proud of lately?
- d. What questions do you have about class?

**CURRICULAR BRAIN BREAKS – Another kind of brain break is one that relates back to your curriculum. Both administrators and teachers love this one.**

26. STOP AND TEXT – (HANDOUT) This handout is a more extended version, but at anytime during your lesson, you can have students STOP & TEXT. You can use the form I created or create one of your own that you pass out and have them write a quick text based on the subject you are currently studying. Then students get up and share their texts with someone else. If you have a classroom that allows cell phones or Twitter, you can actually have the students text. You can also give them a specific hashtag on Twitter for all of them to post their information.

27. Entrance Ticket (HANDOUT) – I have included a sample entrance ticket for you to look at. You can also do a MID CLASS TICKET – have students write down what is happening, any questions they might have, etc. On my ticket I include an Instagram photo, which is fun for high school students to do.

28. TED (HANDOUTS) – I love <http://www.ted.com>. It is a website full of short and long videos. I have included some handouts I have created for TED – there is a full bundle in my TPT store. There are a lot of very short TED videos that are great to show in class. With the search tool on the website, you are sure to find something that connects to your curriculum. The three ideas below won’t necessarily connect with your curriculum, but they are good brain break ideas that stemmed from TED.



29. Love Letters (HANDOUT) – One of the TED videos is Hannah Brencher, who suggests leaving letters for strangers in hidden places. For one brain break in my class, we took a few minutes to write an encouragement letter to a stranger.
30. Before I Die (HANDOUT) – Candy Chang has a great short TED on a cool art installation she did asking people the things they want to do before they die. Students can write on slips of paper, Post-Its, or on a chart you have on the wall. It's neat to see some of their goals.
31. 30 Day Challenge (HANDOUT) – Another TED talk by Matt Cutts challenges people to try something for 30 days. You can use the handout I've created or just have a short brain break where students share something they'd like to try for 30 days.
32. Speed Dating – (HANDOUT) Students love this activity. I have included an example in the packet from my unit The Last Lecture by Randy Pausch (the full bundle is at my TPT store). Speed Dating is just like the actual activity in real life. Students talk to another student for an amount of time I set on the clock. Usually they have a set of questions to follow. This is a great way to “shake up” some questions the students absolutely have to answer but you don't want them sitting and working on them quietly, not engaged. You can call out a question number and then have students “switch” to a new partner to get the answer. Also a great way to differentiate and it gets the students moving around.
33. What's My Sentence (HANDOUT) – Normally, this is an activity I do with my Tuesdays with Morrie unit. However, this is a great curricular brain break. No matter what subject you teach, you can have students derive a SENTENCE that particular person in history, vocab word, or character might say. For instance, what might a cell say about itself? Students can come up with sentences alone or with partners and stand to recite them.
34. Teen or Tween Tribune – This is a great website that allows students to look at current events related to teenagers. There is an online account teachers and students can have which allow for accountability, but students can comment on articles. It's a really great, short brain break.



**THEME DAYS – In my classroom, I have daily theme days. I got this idea from a fellow colleague in Oklahoma who was our district Teacher of the Year. This naturally lends itself to allowing brain breaks in the classroom. They can be meaningful or silly, they can also be personal to you and your hobbies. My theme days are posted in the classroom and students ask about them EVERY DAY (and I teach high school!!) It’s a great, fun way to keep students engaged.**

35. Inspire Me Monday – Show short, inspiration clips from YouTube on Mondays. I enjoy Kid President and Soul Pancake videos, but there are thousands you can use.

36. Bubble Monday – Yes, I’m a little crazy, but I blow bubbles in the hallway during class periods on Mondays. The students love running through them.

37. Mustache Tuesday – (HANDOUT) I allow my students to wear mustaches on Mondays – I just print them on Avery Labels. Most of them just stick them on their binders.

38. Unbirthdays – One of my theme days is unbirthdays. These are my natural brain breaks on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

39. Throwback Thursday – Take a brain break and show pictures of yourself from high school or elementary school. Kids love this.

40. Muppet Friday – I show the Mahna Mahna song every Friday, but I also show short Muppet clips. A great, 1-2 minute brain break.

STATIONS OR PARTICIPATORY BRAIN BREAKS – If we have an station brain break, students can choose what they want to do for 5 minutes. So the next 10 brain breaks are some you can do when you tell students they have 5 minutes to participate in whatever brain break they choose. Keep a list of these on your board or on the wall, so when you tell them it is a “CHOICE” brain break, they can refer to the list.

41. Puzzle – I leave a jigsaw puzzle set up in the corner of my classroom. Students who enjoy puzzles can use their brains to work on this brain break

42. Dream Tree – (HANDOUT) Create a tree on a bulletin board or bring one to life. Allow students to fill out the DREAM TREE handout and then cut off the bottom and hang it on the tree.



43. Leave a Footprint – (HANDOUT) Make a bulletin board of footprints – how students want to change the world. During the 5 minute brain break, students can write on and cut out their foot, adding it to the other footprints.

44. Landmarks and Landmines – (HANDOUT) Have a place where students can create a timeline of their week or month. Have them chronicle the landmarks (positives) and landmines (negatives) of their school week or month. Great way to check in on how they are doing.

45. Get to Know Your handouts – (HANDOUTS) Have one station be full of surveys or get to know your handouts the students can fill out. Another way to keep tabs on the interests of your students.

46. Quotes – (HANDOUT) Have a station full of quotes. Students can pick one to write about.

47. Show and Tell (HANDOUT) – There is an example of what I do for Show and Tell in the high school classroom. I have students pick out an assignment they are proud of and take it home to talk about with their parents. During this 5 minute brain break, students can choose an assignment and fill out the Show and Tell handout.

48. Mailboxes – I have a mailbox for each high school student. They keep track of their assignments there and that is how I turn back papers. There may be some helpful students who would like to pass back papers to the mailboxes or to students themselves.

49. No Names – I have a no name box in my classroom. During this 5 minute break, it is a great time to check and make sure none of those assignments in the box belong to you!

50. Take a Lap – Seriously, sometimes I have bodily kinesthetic students who just need to take a lap and walk around the room. It gets their brains going and gets the ants out.

Although this list is not exhaustive, it is a good start. If you are interested in the entries that are labeled “handout,” feel free to visit my [Teachers Pay Teachers store](#). There, you can find over 30 handouts that can be used with these ideas.



## teachupsidedown: 15 ways to use PLAY-DOH in the junior/high school classroom

**Author:** Carrie Wisehart

June 10, 2016

Blog: [teachupsidedown](#)

This list of Play-Doh activities (if you'd like the 9 pages of handouts you can grab them [here](#) at my Teachers Pay Teachers store!) is meant for use in the junior high or high school classroom, and will employ kinesthetic activities while still checking for understanding and reinforcing the learning taking place.

I have found that students (yes, even high school students!) JUMP at the chance to use play-doh in the classroom. They love the "throwback" to their childhoods as well as getting to use their hands. If you don't know how to get enough play-doh, at the beginning of the year I put it as an optional item (on my syllabus) for students to bring in. They are so excited about it that many of them bring in more than one tub!

Also, it's important to note that CREATE is at the TOP of Bloom's Taxonomy. When students are forced to synthesize what they've learned and make a sculpture, they are doing some crazy critical thinking. Play-doh is a great way to keep students engaged, let them use their hands, employ creativity, and YOU can have a new and different form of assessment that is actually FUN (did I just say FUN in the same sentence with ASSESSMENT? Mind = blown).

Many of these activities were originally used in a Language Arts and/or World Studies (co-curricular English and World History) classroom, but can definitely be used in any subject classroom with reading assignments, vocabulary needing to be learned, and reflection on topics that require student assessment.

Feel free to use all the ideas listed below, but if you'd like the handouts, [click this link!](#)

1. **Play-Doh Check for Understanding Activity (handout)**– this activity is a way to assess reading the students have done for homework. Students summarize the chunk of reading and then choose a section to create a play-doh sculpture. After the play-doh construction, students work with partners to reflect on what they chose and why.



2. **Play-Doh Vocabulary Matching Game (handout)**– the teacher directs the students to 10 vocabulary words he/she would like them to learn and/or reflect on. From those words, students can either be assigned or choose their own word to write a sentence in context and create a sculpture that best reflects that word. Students write their words and definitions or sentences on paper and play a “matching game” with other students from the class, matching the correct word to the sculpture. A great formative assessment or review game.
3. **Kinesthetic Brain Engagement (handout)** – One of the common assessments used by English teachers is a Socratic Seminar. One type of Socratic Seminar is called the “Fish Bowl”, when one group of students is in the center having discussion and the rest of the students are listening and taking notes. Often I’ve noticed the outside circle of students is not engaged in the class discussion. A great way to use play-doh is to ask students to create a sculpture related to the discussion and explain how & why that sculpture applies to the class discussion OR class lecture.
4. **Process Play-Doh** – Have students use play-doh to artistically represent a process.
5. **Time-line Play-Doh (handout)** – Have students create a timeline (or this handout could also be used for the process) by placing a small play-doh sculpture in each of the five boxes on the handout. It is always good to have students explain their sculptures to someone else in a reflective activity.
6. **Reconstruction** – Students can reconstruct a location from a certain time period or a setting from a story. They can use clues from the text to make the construction. This can be used in most subjects with an emphasis on text evidence.
7. **Model** – In Science classes, students can create models of cells, etc. In History, students can create models of inventions or historical objects of importance. In English, models can be made of the writing process or symbols used in writing. In math class, students can make models of a story problem, or even create a graph out of play-doh just to give them the opportunity to look at things differently than the way they usually do.
8. **Gallery Walk (handout)** – With any of the activities you do with play-doh, it is always great to have students do a gallery walk. You can use the critical thinking questions on the handout attached, or you can come up with your own.
9. **Game of Bowling** – Students create bowling pins and bowling balls from play-doh. Develop a list of questions based on how many “pins” a student knocks down.
10. **Sculptionary Review Game**– Based on the game Pictionary, make slips of paper with vocab or terminology on them. Place the students in teams or partnerships and have them draw the term. They have 30 seconds – 1 minute (you choose) to create that sculpture and see if the other students on their team can guess.
11. **For Kinesthetic Students** – For kids who have trouble sitting still (your tappers, clickers, and noise makers), make play-doh an option. Obviously set rules for how and when they can use it, but if you need someone to keep their hands busy, make play-doh available whenever they need it. At the beginning of the year, I always have my students take a learning styles quiz so I know who is kinesthetic (more and more every year!).



12. **YOU create the sculpture! (handout)** – Why should the kids have all the fun? Make a sculpture or sculptures for a bell-ringer. Have the students identify what the sculpture is and how it is related to yesterday’s class or last night’s reading.
13. **Mapping**– If you are using a map for any reason, play-doh is a great way to “emphasize” certain locations by adding little sculptures that identify what happened in that particular location or what important event happened there. This can be used in foreign language classes, History courses, and even ecological studies.
14. **Living Comic Strip (handout)** – Students can take parts of a story, chapter, and/or section and create a living comic strip complete with dialogue bubbles and captions. You can copy the handout as many times as needed. Students will probably prefer to make their own comic strip so it fits their own comic.
15. **Show and Tell (handout)**– when students come back from a break, instead of having them share what they did over the break, have them sculpt it. A great back-to-school activity.



## 9 brain break ideas to help your students focus

**Author:** Melissa Williams

May 9, 2019

Everyone can use a little break sometimes. Maybe it's because your students have been studying diligently or working on challenging concepts, or perhaps a holiday is approaching or one has just wrapped up. Of course, it's also possible that your students simply need a quick break from the norm to refocus and be productive.

Whatever the reason, having a stock of cool brain break activity ideas on hand can be a lifesaver. Let's review some break ideas that you can use in your class so your students can feel re-energized and ready to go.

And hey — these brain breaks can be great for you as a teacher, too! It's wonderful to free yourself from the regular routines once in a while and have some fun with your students.

### 1. The atom game

There are many variations of this game. One way to carry it out is to call out different ways for students to move around the room (or outdoor space, gymnasium, etc.). Tell them to move around like cats, dinosaurs, space aliens, very fancy people, very old people ... You get the idea! Then, call out a number with the word 'atom' (e.g., "Atom three!"). Students must then quickly join up into groups of three. Think of it like musical chairs — any stray 'atoms' are out of the game until there are two players left. I've used this game with kids from kindergarten up to eighth grade, and every grade level of students was able to have fun with it and get some energy!

### 2. Silent ball

This game is great because you can incorporate a little physical activity and coordination while maintaining an enviably silent room. Get a soft, medium-sized ball and let students grab a spot for themselves around the classroom. The goal is to not let the ball drop to the floor. Students must constantly pass the ball to each other without using any words or noises.

This sounds a little easier than it actually is, as students have to be really focused and responsive to body language. Add in a rule that they can't pass the ball back to the same person immediately, or that a girl must pass to a boy and vice versa — anything to keep the ball from staying with the same few students! Set a timer and have a five-minute round of silent ball; if students successfully keep the ball from dropping, give them a reward like ten minutes of free time next Friday.



### 3. Would you rather ...

Have the class convene in a central area of the room and pose a few thought-provoking ‘would you rather’-style questions. Would you rather never have chocolate again or never have ice cream again? Would you rather have the superpower of flight or invisibility? The options are endless and super fun!

Students who pick option A would move to one side of the room and those who choose option B to the other. Then, everyone would meet back in the middle for the next round. If you want to carry over this brain break activity to your next lesson, keep track of the numbers you get from the results and have students chart the outcomes!

### 4. Dance up a storm

Freeze dance is a popular form of classroom dance incorporation. Play a catchy tune and let students freely dance (or call out instructions to dance in particular ways, such as “Dance as if you have a sore foot” or, “Dance as if you just woke up”). Every so often, pause the music and have students freeze on the spot, likely in comical poses!

Another variation of this idea is to use your SMART Board to have students dance along with movement songs: The Chicken Dance, the YMCA, the Macarena — you get the idea! Pull up those wedding reception classics and have a ball with your students.

### 5. Tried-and-true activity pages

This idea is for individual students who’ve finished their work and are looking for nice little break activity. These are common in classrooms for a good reason — students are engaged and quiet while taking a mental break. Crosswords, word searches, Sudoku, coloring pages for younger students ... There are tons of options! Have a small container or cardboard tray with a stack of fun pages for students to access when needed.

Speaking of coloring pages, they are not limited to your youngest students! There are fabulous, extremely detailed coloring books and pages for older students that can serve as a zen relaxation experience for kids of any age.

### 6. Card tricks

Now, can use this one only once per class because students will know the trick after that. First, you’ll need to have one ‘magician’ in the class who’s in on the trick. You’ll draw nine ‘cards’ on your whiteboard in three rows of three cards each (simple rectangles are fine).



The student who knows the trick will step out of the room for a moment while the rest of the class quietly chooses a secret card. When the student returns, you'll begin pointing to cards and asking if each is the chosen one. The magician will need to respond accordingly. But how will they know which card it was if they weren't present in the room?

Ah, but therein lies the trick! You're going to show your special volunteer magician the chosen card in a sneaky way so that the other students don't figure it out. When you select the first card to ask them about, you'll actually touch a specific point on its surface to communicate the position of the true secret card *within the three-by-three grid*. Your helper can make a mental note of which card the class selected and respond correctly to all inquiries.

Notice that it doesn't actually matter *when* you point to the secret card, as long as the magician understands that the first card you point to will identify the position of the secret card in the grid. From that point onward, for all other cards, you can point to any position (in fact, you should mix it up so the class doesn't get suspicious!).

This has fascinated and stumped students from kindergarten to high school, and they have a great time trying to guess the trick!

## 7. Other quiet options

Along the lines of silent ball, there are a bunch of quiet options for brain breaks. Sleepy Lions is a popular favorite, in which students remain perfectly still and quiet while one student (or you, the teacher!) peruse the room, trying to catch any movement as the guard or zookeeper.

Another super-quiet game is the birthday line-up (variations are endless here, too). Students must silently line up in the order of their birthdays. They can use gestures and hold up their fingers to denote numbers but cannot say a word. It's awesome to see the ingenuity students use to achieve this! At the end, walk down the line and have each student say their birthday aloud to see if they were successful.

## 8. Teach a new skill

Do you have a random skill up your sleeve that never seems to fit with your prescribed lessons or subject area? Are you a math teacher with a cool art technique you've been wanting to share with your students? Carving out a space for a brain break in the form of a mini-lesson is a great way to shake things up.

For example, I learned to fingerspell in ASL as a child and have had a blast teaching students this 'secret code language' as a departure-from-the-norm activity over the years. The bonus is that students are learning something interesting and important and are able to see you, their teacher, in a different light. Also, odds are that this skill will be something you're excited to share with the class — and excitement and enthusiasm are infectious!



## 9. Cool down

Sometimes, just stepping away from it all for a bit can be totally refreshing. If the weather allows, head outside for a class. Let students read in the playground or schoolyard, have them carry out group discussions under a tree, or just let them run around and burn off steam while getting some fresh air.

If you want to do something similar indoors, we have some [creative classroom management ideas](#) you could try. For example, you could have a 'cool-off corner' in the class: a designated space where you can unwind for a quick break as needed.

For setting some still-fun parameters on break time, either use a timer up on the SMART Board. You can also use Classcraft's White Mountain Countdown if you want to *really* add some pizzazz to your countdown endeavors.

## Inject some fun into your classroom!

So, if you can tell that your students are experiencing a learning overload or simply itching to get up and move, test out some of these little tricks, tips, and activities to inject some lighthearted fun back into your room! Trust me, you'll feel better, too.

Melissa Williams is a teacher and freelance writer/editor who also works to develop online courses for students throughout the U.S.. She lives in Manitoba, Canada, with her husband and four children.



## **Energy and Calm: Brain Breaks and Focused-Attention Practices**

**Quick breaks that help students refocus so they can return to work feeling centered and ready to learn.**

**Author:** Lori Desautels

January 14, 2015 Updated September 16, 2016

When presented with new material, standards, and complicated topics, we need to be focused and calm as we approach our assignments. We can use brain breaks and focused-attention practices to positively impact our emotional states and learning. They refocus our neural circuitry with either stimulating or quieting practices that generate increased activity in the prefrontal cortex, where problem solving and emotional regulation occur.

### **BRAIN BREAKS**

A brain break is a short period of time when we change up the dull routine of incoming information that arrives via predictable, tedious, well-worn roadways. Our brains are wired for novelty. We know this because we pay attention to every stimulus in our environment that feels threatening or out of the ordinary. This has always been a wonderful advantage. In fact, our survival as a species depended on this aspect of brain development.

When we take a brain break, it refreshes our thinking and helps us discover another solution to a problem or see a situation through a different lens. During these few minutes, the brain moves away from learning, memorizing, and problem solving. The brain break actually helps to incubate and process new information. Consider trying these activities with your class:



**The Junk Bag:** I always carry a bag of household objects containing markers, scrap paper, and anything that one would find in a junk drawer—for example, a can opener or a pair of shoelaces. Pick any object out of the junk bag and ask students to come up with two ways this object could be reinvented for other uses. They can write or draw their responses. Once students have drawn or written about an invention, they can walk the room for one minute sharing and comparing.

**Squiggle Story:** On a blank sheet of paper, whiteboard, or Promethean Board, draw one squiggly line. Give students one minute to stand and draw with their nondominant hand, turning the line into a picture or design of their choice.

**Opposite Sides:** Movement is critical to learning. Have students stand and blink with the right eye while snapping the fingers of their left hand. Repeat this with the left eye and right hand. Students could also face one another and tap the right foot once, left foot twice, and right foot three times, building speed they alternate toe tapping with their partner.

**Symbolic Alphabet:** Sing the alphabet with names of objects rather than the letters.

**Other Languages:** Teach sign language or make up a spoken language. In pairs, students take turns speaking or interpreting this new language for 30 seconds each.

**Mental Math:** Give a set of three instructions, counting the sequence to a partner for 30 seconds. Example: Count by two until 20, then count by three until 50, finishing with seven until 80. Switch and give the other partner another set of numbers to count.

**Invisible Pictures:** Have a student draw a picture in the air while their partner guesses what it is. You could give them categories such as foods or places, or other ways to narrow the guessing.



**Story Starters:** A student or teacher begins a story for one minute, either individually or with a partner. The students then complete or continue it with a silly ending.

**Rock Scissors Paper Math:** After players say, “Rock, paper, scissors,” the last call-out is “math.” With that call, students lay out one, two, three, or four fingers in the palm of their hand. The first player to say the correct sum of both players’ fingers wins.

## **FOCUSED-ATTENTION PRACTICES**

A focused-attention practice is a brain exercise for quieting the thousands of thoughts that distract and frustrate us each day. When the mind is quiet and focused, we’re able to be present with a specific sound, sight, or taste.

Research repeatedly shows that quieting our minds ignites our parasympathetic nervous system, reducing heart rate and blood pressure while enhancing our coping strategies to effectively handle the day-to-day challenges that keep coming. Our thinking improves and our emotions begin to regulate so that we can approach an experience with variable options.

For the following practices, the goal is to start with 60 to 90 seconds and build to five minutes.

**Breathing:** Use the breath as a focus point. Have students place one hand close to but not touching their nose and the other on their belly. As they breathe in, have them feel their bellies expand. As they exhale, they can feel the warm air hit their hand. Students will focus on this breath for only one minute. Let them know that it’s OK when thoughts sometimes come into the mind uninvited. Tell them to exhale that thought away.

**Colors:** Visualize colors while focusing on the breath. Inhale a deep green, and exhale a smoky gray. Have students imagine the colors as swirling and alive with each inhale. If a student is de-escalating from an angry moment, the color red is a great color to exhale.



**Movement:** This one is for younger children. Direct students to stand and, as they inhale, lift an arm or leg and wiggle it, exhaling it back to its original position. For younger grades beginning these focused-attention practices, it's good to include an inhale and exhale with any type of movement.

**The Deep-Dive Breath:** Have students inhale for four counts, hold for four, and exhale for four counts. You can increase the holding of breath by a few seconds once the students find the rhythm of the exercise.

**Energizing Breath:** Have students pant like a dog with their mouths open and their tongues out for 30 seconds, and then continue for another 30 seconds with their mouths closed, taking short breaths with one hand on the belly. We typically take three energizing pant breaths per second. After a full minute, have students do the deep-dive breath.

**Sound:** The use of sound is very powerful for engaging a calm response. In the three classrooms where I teach, we use rain sticks, bells, chimes, and music. There are many websites that provide music for focus, relaxation, and visualization. Here is one of my favorites.

**Rise and Fall:** As we breathe in and out through our noses, we can lie on the floor and place an object on our stomachs, enhancing our focus by watching the rising and falling of our bellies.

When we're focused and paying attention to our thoughts, feelings, and choices, we have a much greater opportunity to change those thoughts and feelings that are not serving us well in life and in school. When we grasp this awareness, we see and feel the difference.



*A FEW FINAL  
THOUGHTS THAT  
HAVE BEEN PUT  
INTO ACTION*



YOU ARE INVITED TO.....

**Mental Health and Wellness Fair  
Dumont Public Schools**



**Date:** Monday January 22, 2018

**Location:** Dumont High School  
101 New Milford Avenue  
Dumont, NJ 07628

**Arrival Time:** 7:30 am  
**Fair Begins:** 8:05 am



James J. Tedesco III  
*County Executive*  
and the Board of Chosen Freeholders

YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN US...

# Stigma Free Walk a Thon



DATE:

Tuesday, May 1

TIME:

7 PM - 8 PM

LOCATION:

Ramsey High School

COST:

Free!

WHY?

It's an opportunity to start a conversation about mental health. Our hope is to demonstrate that as a community we are dedicated to wiping out any and all stigmas attached to mental health. The night is designed to bring your family, friends, and neighbors out!

FOR MORE INFO VISIT: [RAMSEY.K12.NJ.US](http://RAMSEY.K12.NJ.US)

@RNJSTIGMAFREE



James J. Tedesco III  
County Executive  
and the Board of Chosen Freeholders

## Boys Varsity February 13th

### 7pm

### @Po



# vs.



# #LIMEOUT

**PROUD TO BE  
STIGMA-FREE**






Marianna Morphy pledge to STAMP OUT STIGMA, by learning about MENTAL HEALTH and WELLNESS. I pledge to see the *person*, not the condition, to challenge misconceptions about mental health, and to live a STIGMA-FREE life. I will ask for help, when I need it, and advocate for others. Together, we can make a difference.



## Bathroom/Hallway Signage

 **STUDENT health101**

### How to help a friend who's **STRUGGLING**




Depression can hit at any time, but one of the most common times is between the ages of 15 and 24. If a friend tells you they're depressed, you can help by:

- Being present and spending time with them, whether that's a quiet night in or a fun activity that could take their mind off the depression (if they're up for it).
- Accepting them and their depression. Recognize that they can't just "cheer up" or "get over it."
- Encouraging physical activity. Go for a hike together, join a yoga or dance class, or organize a basketball game.

Here's what *not* to say (these statements are unsupportive and can be hurtful):

- "You're being really irrational/ acting crazy."
- "Everyone gets depressed sometimes."
- "Just cheer up. Snap out of it. Forget about it."
- "You've got it way better than some people."
- "When are you going to act like your old self again?"

To learn more about the signs of depression, check out our article *Students share how they deal with depression*.



James J. Tedesco III  
County Executive  
and the Board of Chosen Freeholders

## 1 in 5 teenagers live with a mental illness.

In a classroom of a 20, that's four students in the room who could be struggling to keep up with schoolwork, maintain friendships, enjoy hobbies, get through the day, or even just get up in the morning. What do you know about mental illness?

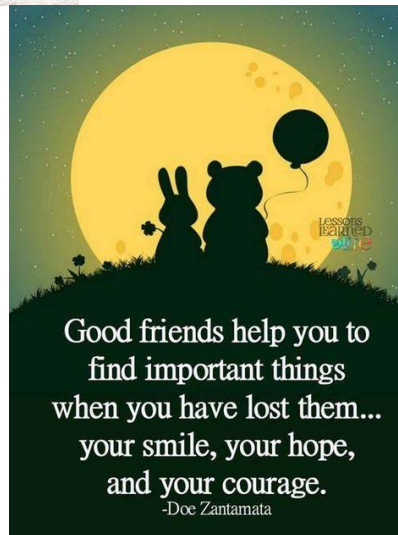
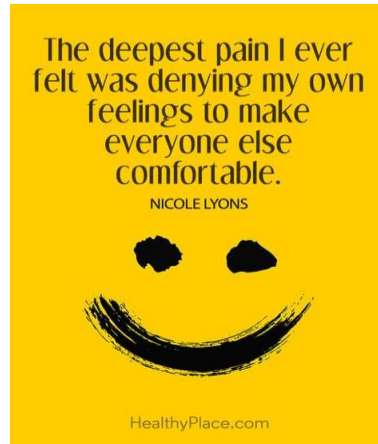
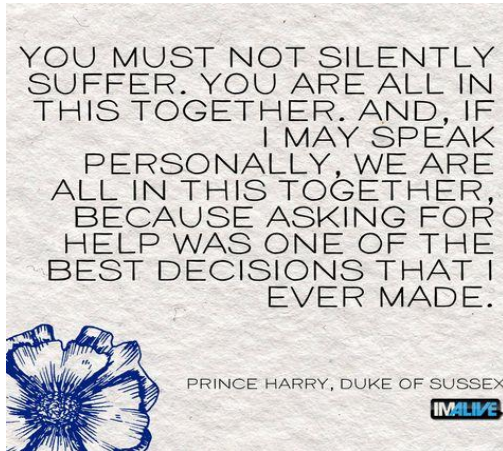
Source: World Health Organization

Join us March 5th @ BCA for workshops about mental health and wellness. The Mental Health Club meets in Room 20 on Thursdays 7:40 AM.

GREEN  
RIBBON  
DAY



## Signage and Inspirational Quotes



Problems challenge me to better myself in every way

I am capable

I spread joy

“Don’t let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.” – John Wooden

“Strive for progress, not perfection.” – Unknown

“Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.” – Jim Ryun

“In a world where you can be anything, be kind.” – Jennifer Dukes Lee

“You have to be odd to be no.1.” – Dr. Seuss