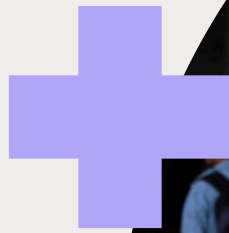


Back-to-School Activity Bundle to Support Student Mental Health



Back-to-school is a great time to start fresh, learn new skills, and develop healthy habits.

The beginning of each school year brings out different emotions for different students. Some feel excited, others feel anxious, and more often than not students feel a mixture of many emotions. Regardless of how a particular student may feel about coming back to school, now is an excellent time for you to teach or revisit skills that students can use to support their mental well-being.

We've organized this activity book across five domains to support student mental health:

- Reduce Stress
- Cope with Anxiety
- Build Confidence
- Deepen Social Connections
- Manage Technology Use

**Every child
deserves to thrive.**



Table of Contents

Reduce Stress

- Self-Care Activity List (Elementary)
- Self-Care Activity List (Middle & High)
- Lazy 8 Breathing (All Students)
- Shake It Off (All Students)

Cope with Anxiety

- Is Running from Fears Helpful? (Elementary)
- Getting Rid of ANTS (Middle & High)
- Back-to-School Worries (All Students)

Build Confidence

- My Strengths (All Students)
- Self-Appreciation (All Students)

Deepen Social Connections

- What Makes a True Friend? (Elementary)
- Is This Relationship Healthy? (Middle & High)
- My Support System (All Students)

Manage Technology Use

- Screen Time & Emotions Tracker (Middle & High)
- Pull the Plug (All Students)



Skill #1:

Reduce Stress

**Keep stress under control
when the going gets tough.**



**There's no way to eliminate all stress.
But the more we can identify stressors
and manage our response when stress
arises, the better we are able to handle
difficult situations.**

By encouraging students to use stress reduction techniques in their every day life, they can build resilience and their capacity to handle stress when it inevitably comes their way.

Use these worksheets to help students practice stress reduction through self-care, intentional breathing, and movement.

Self-Care Activity List

Self-care is all about taking time to do things that help you hit the reset button and feel more relaxed. Read the list below and pick a few activities that you enjoy and make them a part of your routine to help you feel your best. Circle your favorites or add some of your own.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Drawing or coloring | 11. Writing in a journal |
| 2. Reading a book | 12. Watching a favorite show |
| 3. Listening to music | 13. Playing with pets |
| 4. Playing outside | 14. Gardening |
| 5. Crafting | 15. Taking deep breaths |
| 6. Playing a game | 16. Dancing |
| 7. Baking | 17. Creating a story |
| 8. Talking with friends or family | 18. Building a fort |
| 9. Building with Lego or blocks | 19. Listening to a story |
| 10. Doing a fun exercise | 20. Having quiet time |

What other activities do you enjoy? Add them here:

Self-Care Activity List

Self-care is all about taking time to do things that help you hit the reset button and feel more relaxed. Read the list below and pick a few activities that you enjoy and make them a part of your routine to help you feel your best. Circle your favorites or add some of your own.

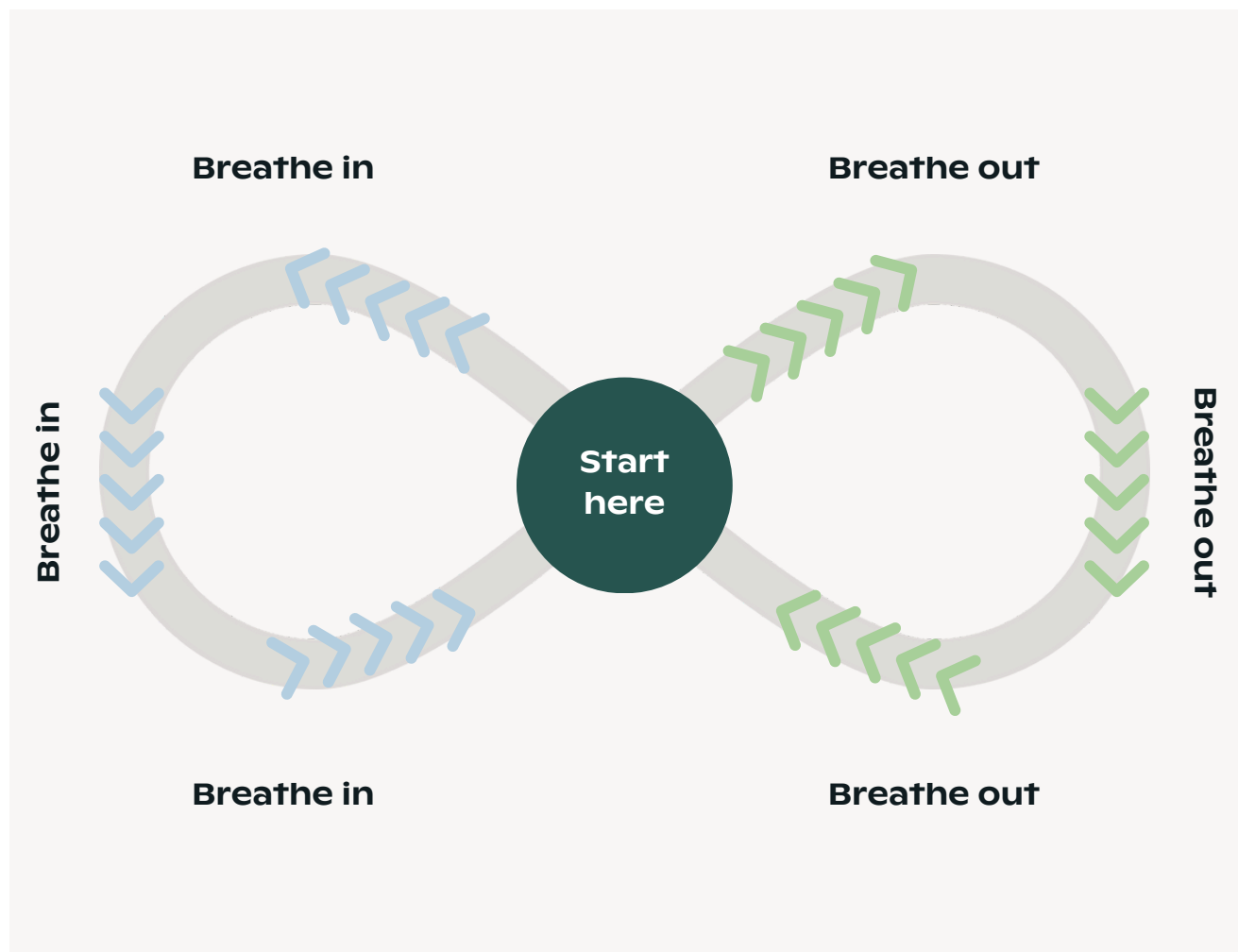
- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Journaling | 11. Playing a game |
| 2. Listening to music | 12. Crafting |
| 3. Drawing or coloring | 13. Practicing a hobby |
| 4. Reading | 14. Watching a movie or TV show |
| 5. Exercise | 15. Yoga or stretching |
| 6. Meditation | 16. Breathing exercises |
| 7. Spending time in nature | 17. Organizing your space |
| 8. Talking with friends | 18. Gardening |
| 9. Taking a bath or shower | 19. Writing letters or cards |
| 10. Cooking or baking | 20. Listening to podcasts or audiobooks |

What other activities do you enjoy? Add them here:

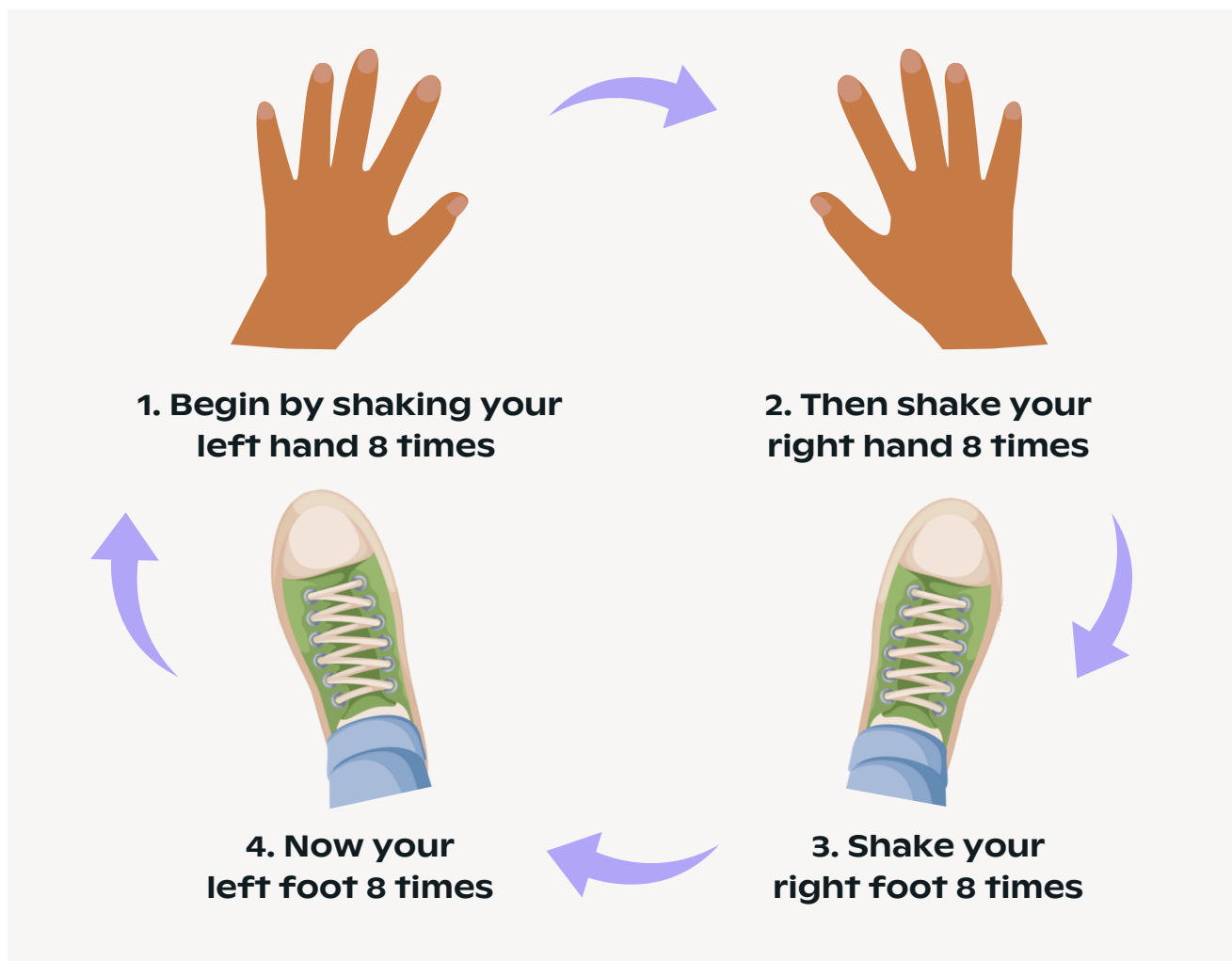
Lazy 8 Breathing

Did you know taking deep breaths can help us feel calmer and more relaxed? Taking slow, deep breaths sends a message to our brain and the rest of our body that we're safe and can help us manage negative feelings.

- Trace the Lazy 8 with your finger, starting at the center and taking a deep breath in.
- As you cross over to the other side of the Lazy 8, slowly breath out through your mouth.
- Continue breathing around the Lazy 8 until your body and mind feel calm.



Stress is energy in your body that helps you get ready to face challenges or problems. Just like when you use energy to run or learn something new, you can use this stress energy to make changes or solve issues. Sometimes, movement can help us better understand and use our stress. In this exercise we move our bodies to help us use our energy and feel calmer.



Next, repeat the cycle by shaking each body part 7 times, then 6 times, all the way down to 1 shake for each body part.

Notice how your body and mind feel after completing the exercise.

Skill #2:

Cope with Anxiety

Recognize and de-escalate anxiety before it takes over.



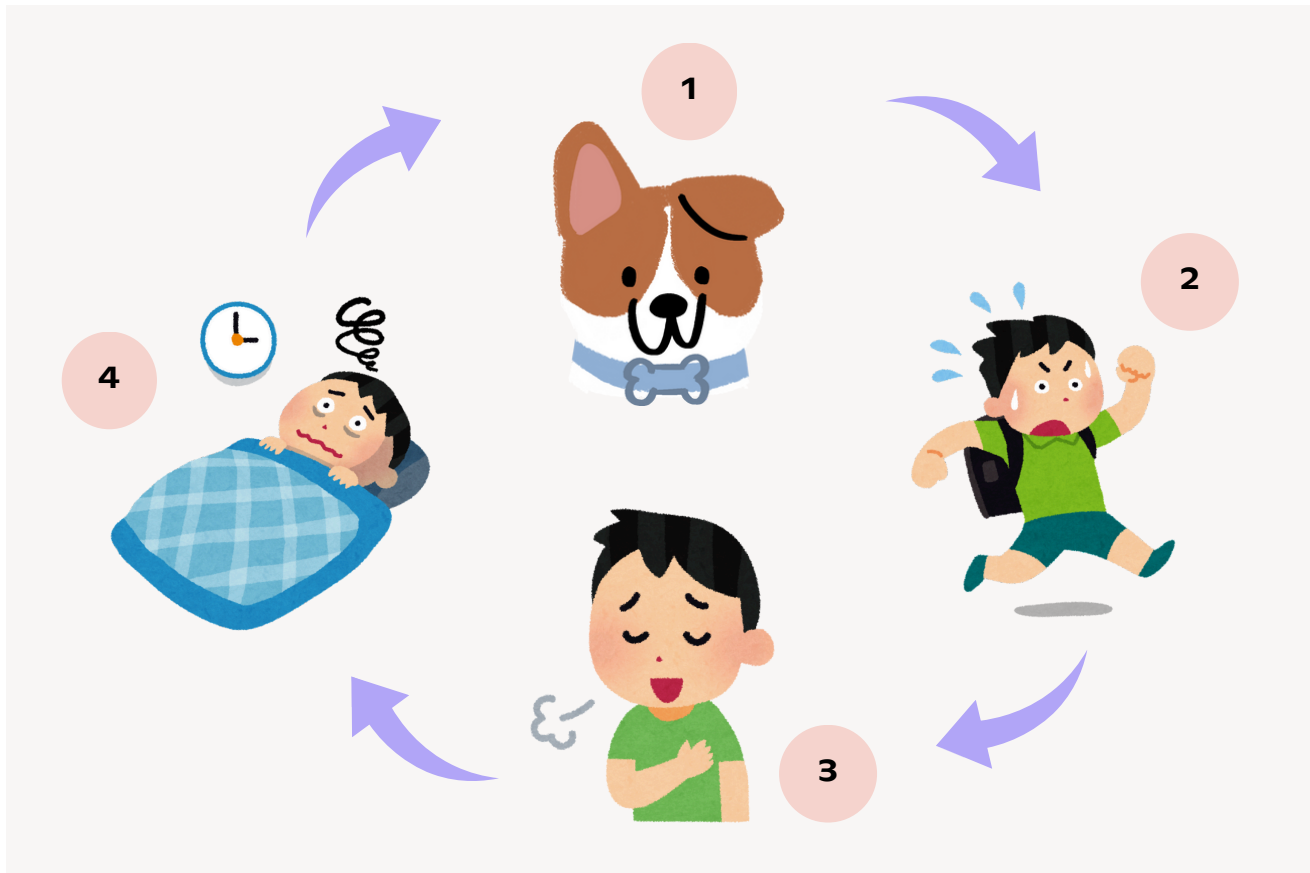
Facing, rather than avoiding, what makes us feel anxious can help us see our strength.

When anxiety takes over, our fight-or-flight response kicks in and we feel in danger. Knowing how to recognize our fight-or-flight response and learning to see the reality of what we're facing can offer relief.

Use these worksheets to help students recognize when anxious thoughts are visiting and how to challenge those thoughts.

Is Running From Fears Helpful?

Imagine that you are afraid of dogs. You are worried that a dog will bite you. So you avoid all dogs. What happens as a result? Talk through the pictures.



What do you think would happen if instead of avoiding all dogs, you tried to approach one dog?

What would it feel like to pet one dog and have a good experience?

If you had one good experience, might you try to pet another dog?

What would continue to happen if you start to pet more dogs?

Do you have a worry or fear you could start to approach rather than run away from?
What would that feel like?

Getting Rid of ANTS

The automatic thoughts that pop into your head can impact how you feel and act. Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS) can be hard to control and can make us act certain ways without us even realizing it.

Think about situations that may cause an ANT to come up. What's a more rational or helpful thought you can replace it with?

Situation	ANT	Rational/Helpful Thought
Ex: I forgot to do my homework	Ex: I'm so dumb and I'm going to fail this class.	Ex: Everyone forgets their homework occasionally. I can ask for a make-up assignment.

When you practice recognizing your ANTS and replacing them with more positive or self-compassionate thoughts, do you notice any changes to your mood? Similar to when you learn and practice something new, the more you practice getting rid of ANTS the easier it will feel to have more helpful thoughts.

For All Students

Back-to-School Worries



Sometimes, coming back to school can cause worries. Color in the shapes that describe something you are worried about and add in your own worries. When these worries come up for you, what are some helpful things you can tell yourself?

Will my friends
be in my
class(es)?

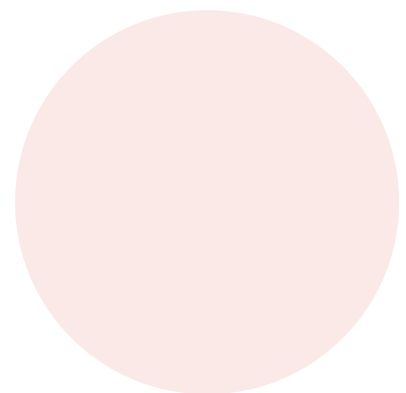
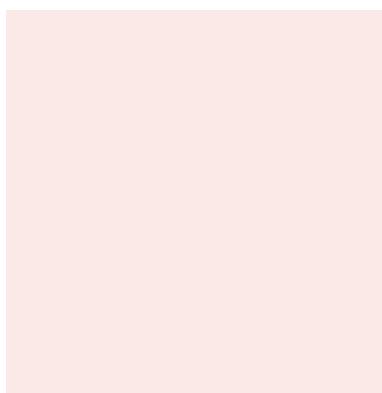
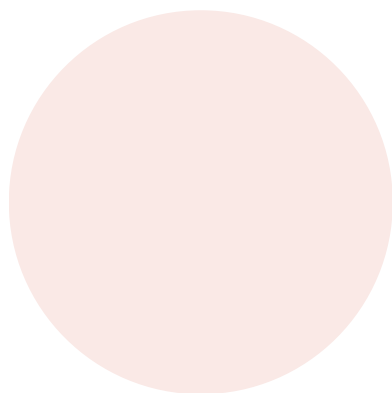
What if the other
kids don't like me?

What if
I get lost?

Who will I sit
with in class or
at lunch?

What if I have to
speak in front of
the whole class?

What if this
grade is too
hard for me?



The next time a worry comes up for you, try to think of helpful or kind things you can say to yourself, or something you can do about that worry. Does it change the way you think or feel?

Skill #3:

Build Confidence

Confidence starts with you.



Having confidence in ourselves and a sense of self-worth is more important than anything anyone else says about us.

Negative self-talk can get in the way of building confidence. Having a positive internal voice can help us navigate life with more optimism and resilience.

Use these worksheets to help students build confidence by identifying their strengths and practicing self-compassion.

<input type="checkbox"/> Kind	<input type="checkbox"/> Loyal	<input type="checkbox"/> Hopeful
<input type="checkbox"/> Generous	<input type="checkbox"/> Creative	<input type="checkbox"/> Non-judgmental
<input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtful	<input type="checkbox"/> Cooperative	<input type="checkbox"/> Patient
<input type="checkbox"/> Curious	<input type="checkbox"/> Adventurous	<input type="checkbox"/> Reliable
<input type="checkbox"/> Humble	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident	<input type="checkbox"/> Funny
<input type="checkbox"/> Responsible	<input type="checkbox"/> Artistic	<input type="checkbox"/> Athletic
<input type="checkbox"/> Flexible	<input type="checkbox"/> Helpful	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Brave	<input type="checkbox"/> Hardworking	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Persistent	<input type="checkbox"/> Empathetic	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

My top three strengths are:

I am _____

I am _____

I am _____

One strength I want to develop is:

When I am at my best, how do my strengths show up?

For All Students

Self-Appreciation



What do I appreciate about myself? Write as many things you can think of.



Why do you appreciate these things about yourself? Sometimes it's easier to describe things we appreciate about others. By reflecting on what we appreciate about ourselves, we can build our confidence and resilience.

Skill #4:

Deepen Social Connections

Social connections matter.

Having positive friendships with others builds our support system so we have people we trust and can talk to in difficult moments.

One of the most important factors that contributes to a person's mental health is their support system. This support system can include school friends, family members, teachers, counselors, teammates, faith leaders, and neighbors. Everyone's support system will look different, and they can take time to build.

Use these worksheets to help students reflect on their friendships and relationships and forge healthy and meaningful connections with others.



What Makes a True Friend?

Think of a friend in your life and read each of the sentences below. Check the box if it describes the friend you have in mind.

- ☐ They try not to hurt my feelings.
- ☐ They apologize if they hurt my feelings.
- ☐ They are honest with me.
- ☐ They use kind words with me.
- ☐ They spend time with me.
- ☐ They give me space when I want alone time.
- ☐ They listen to me when I speak.
- ☐ They stick up for me.
- ☐ They enjoy the same things as me.
- ☐ They laugh with me (not at me).
- ☐ They include me when I want to be included.
- ☐ They celebrate when good things happen to me.
- ☐ They help me feel OK when I feel sad, worried, or mad.

If you checked most of the boxes, it sounds like you have a true friend! If you did not check most of the boxes, notice what's missing and how that makes you feel. What can you do about the parts that are missing?

Now think about how you show up for your friends. Draw a star next to each statement that describes you as a friend. In what ways are you a good friend? In what ways could you be a better friend?

Some people don't know we can also be a friend to ourselves. What kind of friend are you to yourself? Are you patient and forgiving? Do you use kind words? How can you be a better friend to yourself?

Is This Relationship Healthy?

Below are two lists: one with healthy relationship traits, and one with unhealthy relationship traits. Use this worksheet to reflect on a friendship or relationship you have with someone. Read each list and check the items that describe your relationship. Consider what's going well in your relationship and what you may want to change.

Healthy Relationships

Check the box if....

- ☐ We always feel safe with each other.
- ☐ We trust each other.
- ☐ We respect each other's opinions, even when they're different.
- ☐ We apologize when we're wrong.
- ☐ We resolve conflicts with respectful, kind words.
- ☐ We each have decision-making power.
- ☐ We encourage each other to pursue our interests.
- ☐ We respect each other's privacy - such as texts and phone calls.
- ☐ We never pressure each other to do things - like having sex, drugs, or alcohol.
- ☐ We never intend to hurt the other.
- ☐ We communicate openly and don't keep secrets.
- ☐ We have friends and family who are supportive of our relationship.

Unhealthy Relationships

Check the box if one or both of you...

- ☐ Gets extremely jealous.
- ☐ Makes the other feel bad.
- ☐ Doesn't listen when the other talks.
- ☐ Frequently criticizes the other.
- ☐ Pressures the other do things (e.g., have sex, vape, use drugs/alcohol)
- ☐ Controls how the other dresses.
- ☐ Controls how the other spends their time.
- ☐ Ignores the other.
- ☐ Never admits to being wrong.
- ☐ Threatens to hurt or makes the other feel unsafe.
- ☐ Is dishonest or secretive.
- ☐ Tries to hide the relationship from friends and family.

Reflection Questions:

Which parts of your relationship do you most like and which parts do you wish were different? Are there parts that feel unhealthy? How could you figure it out if you're not sure? What changes could you make? What things are out of your control?

Remember if someone is physically or emotionally hurting you, that is never OK and you are not alone. Please talk to a school counselor, therapist, or other trusted adult in your life who can help.

A support system is an important thing for everyone to have. It includes the people in your life you can talk to about things that are on your mind, help you problem-solve, or make you feel safe and comfortable. Who is in your support system?

Fill in these blanks to help identify who is in your support system.

Someone I can share happy news with: _____

Three people I trust: _____

An adult at school I can talk to: _____

Someone I can talk to when I'm feeling sad: _____

Someone who gives good advice: _____

Someone I can cry in front of: _____

I feel safe when I'm with: _____

Someone I can talk to about my feelings: _____

Someone I can call in an emergency: _____

Their phone number: _____

Reflection questions:

What do you like about each person in your support system?

What does each of them do to help you to feel supported?

What makes it easier or harder to go to someone when you need support?

How do you know when you need support?

Skill #5:

Manage Technology Use

**Technology is here to stay.
How we use it is up to us.**

Believe it or not, we have a choice when it comes to screens. We can let them rule our world or we can decide to engage thoughtfully.

The more we can help students be in control of their relationship with technology and social media, the more easily they'll be able to create boundaries and recognize unhealthy patterns.

Use these worksheets to help students recognize the engagement patterns and emotions related to their social media and technology usage and help them take control.



[illegible]

There are many ways to have fun without a TV, computer, tablet, or phone. List out ten screen-free activities you enjoy or would like to try. Then plan when you'd like to unplug and try these activities.

	Screen-Free Activity	When can I next do this activity?
	Riding my bike	After school on Thursday
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

The next time you are tempted to be on a screen, try one of these activities instead!

Reflection Questions:

What did you enjoy about each activity? How did it make you feel during and after?

Questions? Contact us.

Email: office@cartwheelcare.org

Call/text: 617-272-7439

Emergency Contact Information:

If you or a loved one are experiencing emotional distress or in crisis, call or text 988 for free, confidential 24/7 support, or visit www.988lifeline.org.

If you are currently experiencing an emergency, call 911 or visit your local emergency department immediately.

www.cartwheel.org

