

thiswayup



Your journey to mental
well-being starts here.



INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to introduce thiswayup: A Mental Well-Being Playbook—a resource developed with one purpose in mind: to support and empower high school students in their mental health journey.

We recognize that schools are more than places of learning; they are communities where young people form their identities, manage challenges, and seek belonging. Educators are at the heart of these communities and are often the first line of support when it comes to a student's emotional well-being.

This playbook was created in response to a concerning reality. According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), over 42% of U.S. high school students reported experiencing persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in the past year. These statistics highlight an urgent need for accessible, youth-focused mental health resources that are not only informative but also practical, engaging, and evidence-based.

JOIN US

Who is it for?

While the content is designed for high school students, this playbook is equally intended for the educators who guide and support them. Teachers, guidance counselors, school administrators, and youth workers can use thiswayup to foster conversations, introduce key mental health skills, and integrate emotional learning into everyday classroom practice.

Whether you are looking to enhance your school's health curriculum, support student advisory groups, or simply engage in meaningful dialogue about mental well-being, this resource provides a flexible framework to do so.

How to use the Playbook

Thiswayup is structured around three key areas of mental well-being:

01

Connection To Self

Developing healthy habits like quality sleep, physical movement, and managing overthinking.

02

Connection To Others

Fostering supportive relationships with peers, family, and mentors through shared experiences and meaningful interactions.

03

Connection To the World

Deepening one's sense of belonging through nature, community engagement, and nutrition that supports brain health

WHY IT MATTERS



Mental health directly influences how students learn, form relationships, and engage with the world around them. Supporting emotional well-being is not an “extra”—it is essential to academic success, behavioral health, and lifelong resilience.

By bringing this playbook into your classroom or school, you are helping to normalize conversations about mental health and offering students the knowledge and tools they need to take meaningful action. This playbook is not about being perfect—it’s about making progress, one small, intentional step at a time. For high school students, these formative years are filled with growth, pressure, and uncertainty—and increasingly, mental health struggles.

WHY IT MATTERS

Here's why this work is more urgent than ever:

01

Mental health challenges among teens are at an all-time high.

According to the CDC's 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 42% of high school students reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless, and nearly 1 in 5 seriously considered attempting suicide. These numbers highlight a crisis that demands attention, compassion, and practical tools.

[Source](#)

02

Mental health affects academic performance.

Students struggling with anxiety, depression, or chronic stress often experience difficulties with concentration, memory, and motivation. A study published in School Psychology Quarterly found that teens with poor mental health are up to twice as likely to have lower academic achievement and higher absenteeism.

[Source](#)

WHY IT MATTERS

03

Social connection is protective—and increasingly lacking.

Many students report feeling disconnected or isolated. Loneliness is now considered a serious public health concern. Research shows that strong relationships with peers and trusted adults can buffer against depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts (CDC, 2023).

[Source](#)

04

Sleep, exercise, and nutrition are directly tied to emotional well-being.

Teens who get adequate sleep, move their bodies regularly, and eat well are more likely to report positive moods, stronger focus, and better coping skills. Yet most teens fall short of these basic wellness behaviors, which are often overlooked in traditional mental health conversations.

05

Early intervention matters.

Most mental health conditions begin before the age of 24, and half start by age 14 (National Institute of Mental Health). Equipping teens with emotional literacy, self-awareness, and coping tools can prevent more serious challenges down the line.

[Source](#)

WHY IT MATTERS



This playbook offers timely, student-centered strategies that are grounded in research and designed to meet students where they are. It's a first step—but a powerful one—in helping young people understand themselves, care for their minds and bodies, and build the resilience they need to thrive.

By integrating thiswayup into your classroom, you're not just teaching—you're making a meaningful investment in your students' emotional health, academic success, and lifelong happiness. Their well-being is the foundation for everything else they do.

A NOTE TO EDUCATORS



As you guide students through this mental well-being journey, we want to acknowledge something vital—your well-being matters just as much as theirs.

Educators play a powerful role in shaping the emotional and social climate of their classrooms. But the emotional demands of teaching, especially today, are immense. You are often expected to support others while carrying the weight of your own responsibilities and personal challenges.

That's why the thiswayup Playbook includes self-care practices and reflective moments just for you.

WHY EDUCATOR WELL-BEING MATTERS

You Can't Pour from an Empty Cup

Research consistently shows that teacher burnout, stress, and emotional fatigue directly impact classroom culture, student engagement, and learning outcomes. Supporting your own well-being isn't selfish—it's essential. [Link](#)

Emotionally Healthy Teachers Create Emotionally Healthy Classrooms

When educators model calm, connection, and care, students are more likely to feel safe, seen, and supported. [Link](#)

Small Practices Make a Big Impact

You don't need hours of free time to care for yourself. This playbook offers quick, meaningful practices that fit into your busy day—whether it's a breathing pause, a movement break, or a reminder to reconnect with nature or a colleague. [Link](#)

By including you in this playbook, we're honoring the reality that the mental health of students and educators is interconnected. When you prioritize your well-being, you're not just helping yourself—you're creating the conditions for your students to thrive, too.

Thank you for the care, heart, and humanity you bring to your role. You are not forgotten here. This journey is for you, too.

A COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT



We believe that sustainable change happens when we work together. Through strategic partnerships with schools and youth-serving organizations, we aim to equip more young people—and those who support them—with high-quality mental health tools and practices. Our goal is to contribute to school cultures where well-being is embedded into everyday life and where both students and educators are cared for, connected, and capable.

We are proud to launch the [thiswayup](#) Well-being Playbook and invite you to use this resource to make a difference in your classroom and school community. Together, we can build stronger foundations for youth mental health—and model what it means to thrive.

thiswayup

OPTIMIZING YOUR MENTAL
HEALTH PLAYBOOK

Section 1

Connection to Self:
Better Sleep

CONNECTION TO SELF

Better Sleep



Opening Videos:

[TED Talk: "Why Do We Sleep?" by Matthew Walker](#)

18 minutes

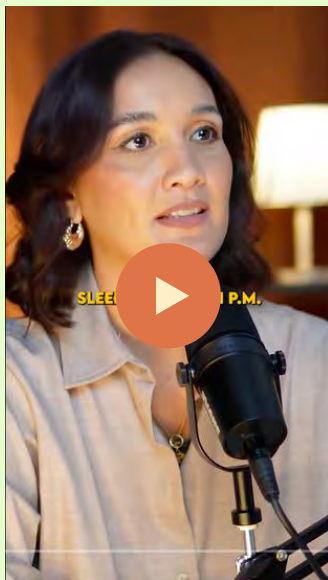
Neuroscientist Matthew Walker dives into the science of sleep, explaining how it impacts memory, mood, and even physical health. His talk is engaging and packed with insights into how sleep affects everything from our brain's ability to process information to our immune system and emotional regulation.

CONNECTION TO SELF

Better Sleep



TikTok Videos:



[Sleeping after 11 pm](#)



[Brain Working During Sleep](#)

Fast Facts

01

Sleep Deprivation Impacts School Performance

- Lack of sleep can make it harder to concentrate, remember information, and solve problems—leading to poorer academic performance, even if you're smart! Sleep is crucial for memory consolidation and cognitive function.

The overall course grades for students averaging six and a half hours of sleep were **down 50 percent** from other students who averaged just one hour more sleep.

(<https://news.mit.edu/2019/better-sleep-better-grades-1001>).

02

Blue Light Disrupts Sleep

- The blue light from phones, tablets, and computers messes with melatonin production, making it harder to fall asleep. Using devices right before bed can delay sleep and make you feel restless.

Chronic misalignment of circadian rhythms can lead to metabolic disorders and mental health conditions such as depression.

(<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2822859>).

03

Sleep Affects Mood and Mental Health

- Lack of sleep is linked to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and irritability in teens. Getting enough rest is key to emotional regulation and mental well-being.

Before the onset of depression, 4 out of 5 people suffer from some form of sleep disturbance (from The Depression Cure) An analysis of controlled trials involving over 8000 subjects showed that improving sleep led to a significant effect on mental health, depression and anxiety. (Chronic misalignment of circadian rhythms can lead to metabolic disorders and mental health conditions such as depression.)

(<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8651630/>).

WHY SLEEP MATTERS

Mental Health Impact

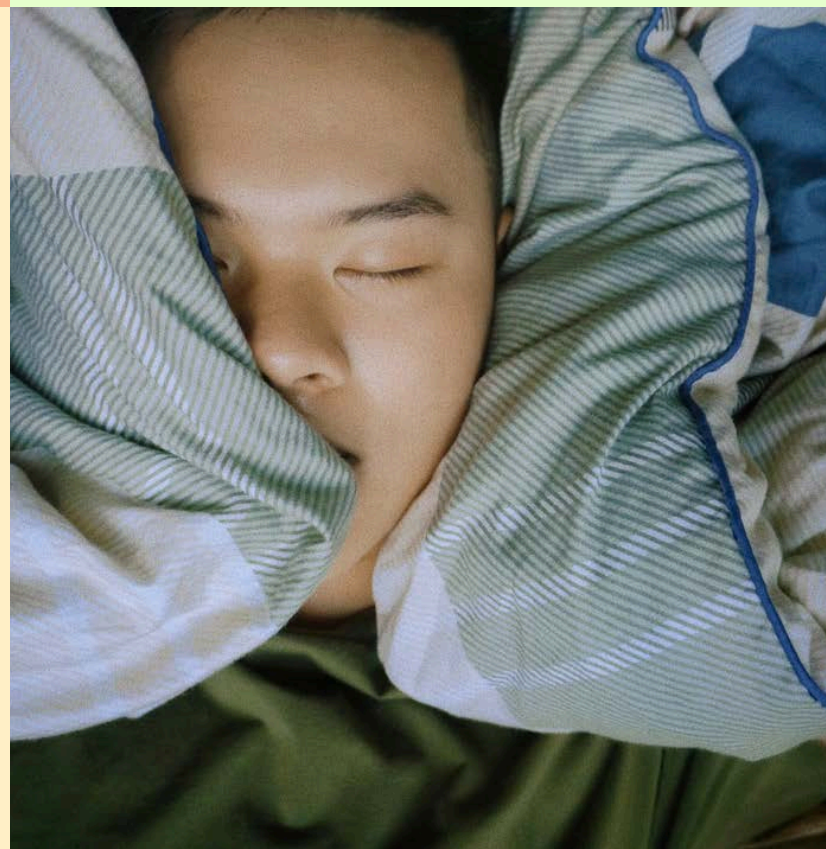
Sleep is essential for emotional stability. When we don't get enough rest, we can become more anxious, stressed, and irritable. Sleep deprivation also affects concentration and memory, making it harder to focus during school or retain information.

Physical Health Impact

Adequate sleep helps the body recover, supports immune function, and improves physical performance

Cognitive Function & Focus

Sleep consolidates memories, helps your brain process information, and enhances decision-making abilities.



Deep Dive

Mood & Emotional Regulation

When you're sleep-deprived, your brain struggles to manage emotions. That means you might feel more moody, angry, or anxious than usual. Studies have shown that a lack of sleep can even increase emotional reactivity, meaning you're more likely to get upset over small things.

Concentration & Performance

When you're well-rested, your brain can process and store new information more easily. This improves focus, memory, and problem-solving skills.

How Sleep Affects Stress

Lack of sleep activates the body's stress response, making you feel more anxious or overwhelmed. In fact, when we don't get enough sleep, our bodies produce more stress hormones like cortisol, which can keep us feeling on edge.

KEY TIPS

01 | Develop a Bedtime Routine

A consistent bedtime routine signals to your brain that it's time to wind down and prepares your body for restful sleep.

What to Include:

Wind-Down Time (30–60 minutes before bed):

- Set aside time to relax and avoid stressful activities. Avoid working on homework, creating social media posts (pause TikTok!) or having arguments before bed.

Relaxing Activities:

- Dim all lights
- Reading (a book or magazine—not on a screen)
- Stretching or doing light yoga
- Do a skin care routine for yourself (put on a face mask!)
- Breathing exercises or mindfulness

Consistent Bedtime:

- Go to bed at the same time each night, even on weekends, to regulate your sleep cycle.
- Do your best to create a routine and allow your body to set a schedule.

KEY TIPS

02 | Limit Screen Time an Hour Before Bed

Why it Matters:

Blue Light and Melatonin:

- The blue light from phones, tablets, and computers interferes with melatonin production, a hormone that helps you fall asleep. When you use devices before bed, your body doesn't get the signal it needs to get sleepy.
- Try blue light blocking or amber glasses.

How to Limit Screen Time:

- **Use Blue Light Filters:** If you have to use screens before bed, enable "Night Mode" or dim brightness. You can also install blue light filter apps to reduce blue light exposure.
- **Set a "Screen Curfew":** Set an alarm to remind you to stop using screens at least 30–60 minutes before bedtime.
- **No Phones in Bed:** Try leaving your phone in another room or at least out of arm's reach so you're not tempted to check it when you're trying to fall asleep.

Alternative Activities:

- Listen to a calming podcast or audiobook (with no screen involved).
- Practice meditation or deep breathing exercises.

KEY TIPS

03

Create a Calm Environment For Sleep

Why Environment Matters:

- A calm, comfortable sleep environment helps signal to your body that it's time to relax and prepare for sleep.

Tips for a Better Sleep Environment:

- **Dark Room:** Use blackout curtains or an eye mask to block out light.
- **Cool Temperature:** The ideal sleeping temperature is around 60–67°F (15–20°C). If you're too warm or too cold, it can disrupt your sleep.
- **Quiet Space:** Keep your room as quiet as possible. Use earplugs or a white noise machine if needed to block out disruptive sounds.
- **Quiet Mind:** If it's difficult to quiet your mind, redirect to a mental activity.
 - Replay scenes from a favorite movie
 - Visualize a relaxing scene
 - Progressive muscle relaxation
 - Diaphragmatic breathing
- **Comfortable Bed:** Make sure your bed and pillows are comfortable. If you're tossing and turning at night, it might be time to reassess your mattress or pillow choice. Try to use your bed only for sleeping and avoid sleeping anywhere other than your bed (conditions your body to sleep when go to bed)
- **Activities:** exercise improves sleep quality. Try meditation to calm your mind and relax you.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Track Your Sleep

01

Sleep Journal: For one week, track your sleep in a journal or app (like Sleep Cycle or a simple note on your phone). Record:

- **Bedtime:** When you go to sleep
- **Wake Time:** When you wake up
- **Sleep Duration:** How many hours you get on average
- **Quality of Sleep:** How well did you sleep? Did you wake up feeling rested or groggy?

Bonus! You can go further and track caffeine amount and time to learn how that may impact your sleep

02

Reflection:

- How many hours of sleep do you get on average each night? Are you getting enough sleep (aim for 8–10 hours for your age)?
- How do you feel in the mornings?
- Are you energized or tired?
- How does your mood and concentration change depending on how much sleep you got?
- What strategies did you try, or what changes did you make? Are there any trends you can identify?

Experiment:

Try making one change to your routine each night (e.g., reduce screen time, create a relaxing bedtime activity, or adjust your room environment) and note the effects on your sleep quality.

CLASS ACTIVITY

How Sleep Affects Mental Health

Group Discussion Prompts:

- How does a lack of sleep affect your mood, schoolwork, or social interactions?
- What are some challenges you face when trying to get enough sleep? How can you overcome these obstacles?
- What are some ways you can support each other in building healthier sleep habits?
- Has anyone tried any of the recommended strategies or others?

Share Sleep Tips:

After discussing, go around the room and have students share any personal tips they've used to improve their sleep. For example, some might suggest using a sleep mask, setting up a "chill zone" with dim lighting, or having a favorite bedtime tea.



TEACHER SELF-CARE ACTIVITY

For Better Sleep

Morning

Get sunlight &
hydrate

Stretch or move your
body

Avoid checking emails
first thing

Day Time

Limit caffeine after
lunch

Take small breaks to
breathe & reset

Stay hydrated

Evening

Power down
screens 30-60
min before bed

Unwind with a
book, bath, or
meditation

Keep bedtime &
wake-up time
consistent

Make your
bedroom cool,
dark & quiet

KEY ADVICE

01 | **Watch your caffeine timing!**

It is important to know that caffeine can still have an effect on the body for around five to six hours after consuming it, which means that if you have a coffee at 3pm, you may still be wide-awake and alert at bedtime! Create your caffeine schedule – figure out when you can have your last caffeine intake so that it does not disrupt your sleep schedule! Think of switching to decaf after lunch!

02 | **Exercise to improve sleep**

Find the best time of the day for YOU to exercise to improve your sleep. In preparation for sleep, the body temperature drops, heart rate slows, and brain waves get slower. By contrast, exercise leads to a rise in core body temperature, an increased heart rate, and higher levels of arousal that can hinder sleep. But for others exercise helps calm anxiety and depression and can help the mind relax in preparation for sleep. So there isn't a hard or fast rule – figure out what works best for YOU and stick to it! Best advice – stick to light to moderate exercise at least 3 – 4 hours before bedtime!



KEY ADVICE

03

Sip Smart: Rethink That Energy Drink!

Energy drinks can significantly disrupt sleep in teenagers due to their high caffeine and sugar content, which overstimulate the brain and body. Most energy drinks contain 100–300 mg of caffeine—much more than a soda or cup of coffee. Caffeine blocks adenosine, a brain chemical that promotes sleep, keeping the brain artificially alert. Teens who consume energy drinks in the afternoon or evening often fall asleep later and get fewer hours of sleep. Regular energy drink consumption is linked with higher chances of insomnia, nightmares, and disrupted sleep cycles in adolescents. Sleep-deprived teens are more likely to experience mood swings, anxiety, and trouble concentrating.

Many energy drinks also contain high amounts of sugar, causing a quick energy spike followed by a crash—leaving teens feeling jittery, then exhausted.



CONCLUSION

Proper sleep isn't just a luxury—it's a necessity for mental and physical health.

Proper sleep isn't just a luxury—it's a necessity for mental and physical health. By developing a bedtime routine, limiting screen time, and creating a calming environment, you can improve the quality of your sleep and boost your well-being. Keep track of your progress and experiment with different strategies to see what works best for you. Remember, small changes can make a big difference in how you feel each day!



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OPTIMIZING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH PLAYBOOK

Section I

Connection to Self:
Staying Active

CONNECTION TO SELF

Staying Active



Opening Video:

[TED Talk: "The Brain-Changing Benefits of Exercise" by Wendy Suzuki](#)

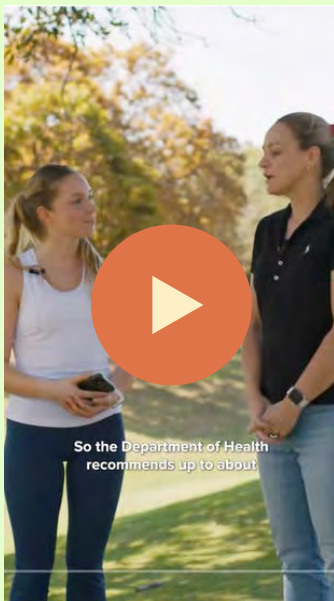
12 minutes

Neuroscientist Wendy Suzuki breaks down how physical activity immediately improves mood, memory, and focus, and even protects the brain from stress and depression.

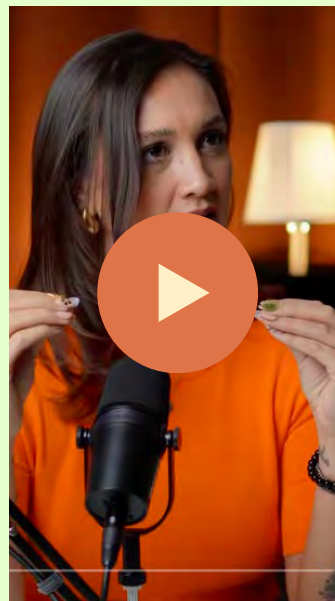
CONNECTION WITH SELF

Staying Active

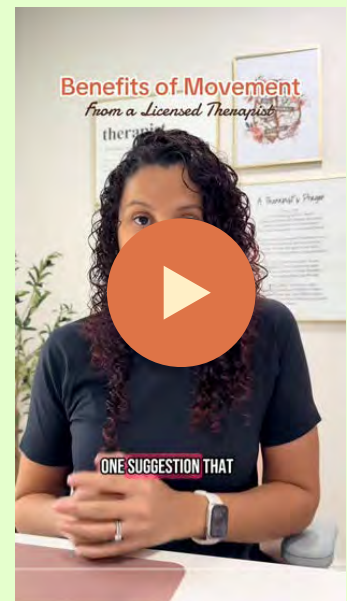
TikTok Videos:



**How Much
Physical Activity
Should We Do
Each Day?**



**20 Minute Walk
a Day**



**Benefits of
Movement**

01

Exercise Boosts Brain Power

- Movement increases blood flow to the brain, improving concentration and memory. Even a 10-minute walk can enhance focus!

Regular activity increases the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which helps neurons grow and strengthens brain connections.

02

Sitting Too Much = Low Energy & Mood

- **Fact:** Teens who spend more than 6 hours sitting daily have higher risks of anxiety and depression. (Source: Journal of Adolescent Health)

Combat this by standing up every 30–60 minutes and adding short movement breaks.

03

Exercise Helps You Sleep Better

- Moving during the day helps regulate circadian rhythms, making it easier to fall asleep and stay asleep.

A study found that teens who exercised for at least **60 minutes a day slept 45 minutes longer on average** than those who didn't. (Source: Sleep Foundation). Just 15–30 minutes of moderate exercise (like brisk walking) each day can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Why it matters: Physical activity boosts mood-regulating brain chemicals like serotonin and endorphins, helping reduce stress and improve emotional well-being.

WHY MOVEMENT MATTERS

Science of Movement:

When you move, your body releases endorphins—natural mood boosters that help reduce stress and increase happiness. At the same time, exercise lowers cortisol (a stress hormone), helping you feel calmer and more in control. Movement also increases dopamine and serotonin, which improve mood and mental clarity.

Mental Health Impact:

Exercise isn't just about getting stronger—it's a powerful tool for mental health. Regular movement can:

- Reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression
- Improve emotional resilience
- Help manage stress by balancing brain chemicals
- Boost self-confidence and motivation

Physical Health Impact:

Staying active benefits your entire body, not just your muscles. It helps:

- Strengthen your heart and improve circulation
- Keep your bones and muscles strong
- Improve immune function, making you less likely to get sick
- Increase lung capacity, helping you feel more energized

Science of Movement:

Studies show that students who engage in regular physical activity perform better on tests and retain information longer. Why? Because movement increases blood flow to the brain, making it easier to concentrate, problem-solve, and stay engaged in learning.

Deep Dive

Mood & Emotional Regulation:

Moving your body can instantly boost mood and reduce symptoms of stress and anxiety. It also helps prevent burnout by giving your mind a break from screens and school stress.

Energy Levels:

Ever feel sluggish during class? Even a quick 5-minute workout can increase energy levels and help you stay alert throughout the day.

How Movement Reduces Stress:

Physical activity lowers stress hormones like cortisol, helping you feel calmer and more in control. It also gives your mind a break from overthinking and worrying.

KEY TIPS

01 | Find Movement YOU Enjoy

Why it Matters: If you enjoy an activity, you're more likely to stick with it! Movement should be fun, not a chore.

How To:

- Try TikTok dance challenges or make your own.
- Walk, bike, or skate with friends.
- Play sports (basketball, soccer, volleyball).
- Try yoga, stretching, or bodyweight workouts at home.
- Explore activities like hiking or jumping rope.

02 | Build Movement Into Your Day

Why it Matters: Small, consistent movement adds up and helps prevent stiffness, fatigue, and loss of focus.

How To:

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Walk while listening to music or podcasts.
- Stand up and stretch between classes.
- Do 10 squats or jumping jacks before sitting down to study.

KEY TIPS

03 | Short Workouts = Big Impact

Why it Matters: Even 10-minute bursts of activity can improve focus and mood without feeling overwhelming.

How To:

- Follow the 5-10-20 Rule:
- 5 minutes of stretching
- 10 minutes of movement (walk, jog, dance)
- 20 minutes of fun activity (sports, workout, yoga)
- Set a timer for short movement breaks throughout the day.

04 | Exercise Helps You Sleep Better

Why it Matters: Movement helps regulate your body's internal clock, making it easier to fall asleep and stay asleep.

How To:

- Aim for at least 30-60 minutes of movement daily.
- Avoid intense workouts too close to bedtime; instead, try yoga or light stretching in the evening

Video: 7 Minute Teenager Workout

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Movement Commitment Challenge

Challenge: Make a personal commitment to move daily for one week! Choose an activity you enjoy and set a goal:

- **Type of Activity** (dancing, walking, yoga, sports, etc.)
- **Goal** (Example: Walk for 20 minutes, do 15 squats a day, stretch every morning)
- **Accountability Partner** (Ask a friend or family member to join you!)

Reflection:

- Did movement impact your mood or focus?
- How did you feel on days you were active vs. inactive?
- What type of movement do you want to continue?



CLASS ACTIVITY



Movement Breaks

Scientists have provided a significant amount of evidence that regardless of age the average learner needs to briefly move their body every 20 - 30 minutes. This enables learners to maintain focus, integrate learning across both of the brain's hemispheres, enter information into memory, and avoid feeling overwhelmed or information overload.

Quick Activity: Every 20-30 minutes, take a **2-3 minute movement break** as a class! Options include:

- Jumping jacks, squats, or lunges
- A quick dance-off or freeze dance game
- Yoga stretches or deep breathing with movement
- Walking around the classroom for a "reset"

Discussion Afterward:

- How did this movement break affect your energy and focus?
- How can you incorporate movement breaks into your daily routine?
- Why do you think working out with a friend or group is more motivating?

TEACHER SELF-CARE ACTIVITY

Midday Movement Reset

Purpose:

Recharge your body and mind with a simple 10–15 minute movement routine you can do during a break, prep period, or after school to reduce stress, boost energy, and reset your focus.

When to Use This:

- Between classes or during a prep period
- Midday slump (around 1–3pm)
- After students leave, before heading home

Routine: The 10–Minute Movement Reset

Shake it Off (1 minute)

- Stand up and shake out your hands, arms, shoulders, and legs. Do a few shoulder rolls and gentle neck stretches. It breaks tension and signals your body to reset.

Walk & Breathe (3–5 minutes)

- Walk a loop around your classroom, hallway, or step outside if possible. As you walk, try a simple breathing pattern: Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 4.

This light cardio + breathing combo reduces cortisol and recharges your focus.



TEACHER SELF-CARE ACTIVITY

Midday Movement Reset

Stretch Sequence (3–5 minutes):

A quick series to open up the body from all the sitting or standing:

- **Standing Forward Fold** – Release your spine and breathe deeply (30 sec)
- **Side Stretches** – Arms overhead, bend gently side to side (30 sec each)
- **Chest Opener** – Clasp hands behind your back and lift your chest (1 min)
- **Seated Hip Stretch** – Sit and cross one ankle over your knee, lean forward gently (1 min each leg)

Optional Add-On (2–5 min):

Turn on a favorite feel-good song and move freely—dance, sway, or march in place. Let it be playful and stress-free!

Reflection Prompt (optional):

- How did this reset change how I feel physically or mentally right now?

Why It Works:

- Lowers stress and cortisol
- Increases circulation and alertness
- Gives your brain a mental reset without screens or caffeine
- Helps you model healthy habits for students



KEY ADVICE

01 | **Improved Focus & Productivity**

Movement breaks help reset attention spans, leading to increased productivity.

02 | **Enhanced Attention & Concentration**

Physical activity can stimulate the brain, improving students' ability to concentrate.

03 | **Boosted Cognitive Performance**

Engaging in movement tasks can enhance cognitive functions, resulting in better academic performance.

04 | **Increased Classroom Engagement**

By incorporating movement, students stay actively involved, making learning more interactive and enjoyable.

CONCLUSION: MOVEMENT IS A FORM OF SELF-RESPECT



Staying active isn't about perfection, hitting the gym every day, or training like an athlete—it's about honoring your body, boosting your mood, and giving yourself what you need to thrive. Movement is one of the simplest and most powerful tools you have to care for your mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

Find the types of movement that feel good for YOU. Whether it's walking your dog, dancing in your room, stretching between classes, or playing a sport—every step, every stretch, and every moment you choose to move is a win for your wellness.

**You don't need to do it all—just do something.
Start small. Stay consistent. Keep it fun.
Your mind and body will thank you.**

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OPTIMIZING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH PLAYBOOK

Section I

Connection to Self:
Overcoming Overthinking

CONNECTION WITH SELF

Overcoming Overthinking



Breaking free from the cycle of overthinking | Adityaveer Sen | TEDxGreenfield Y...



Copy link

How to breakfree from loop of Overthinking



Watch on  YouTube



Opening Video:

["Breaking Free from the Cycle of Overthinking" – Adityaveer Sen](#)

12 minutes

A relatable talk on recognizing the mental traps of overthinking and how to replace them with action-focused thinking.

CONNECTION WITH SELF

Overcoming Overthinking



Opening Video:

"Over Thinking" – Malak ElSheikh

10 minutes, 45 seconds

Malak discusses how overthinking can isolate and exhaust us—and how reconnecting with the present moment brings peace.

CONNECTION WITH SELF

Overcoming Overthinking



"How I Stopped Being an Overthinker" – Tally Feingold

"How I Stopped Being an Overthinker," high school student Tally Feingold shares her personal journey of overcoming overthinking by embracing the concept of the butterfly effect. She explains how small, intentional changes in thought patterns and behaviors can lead to significant improvements in mental well-being. By recognizing the power of minor adjustments, Tally demonstrates that individuals can break free from the cycle of overthinking and cultivate a more positive mindset.

6 minutes, 33 seconds

Fast Facts

01

Overthinking is Linked to Anxiety and Depression

- When your brain is stuck in a loop of constant thoughts, especially negative ones, it increases stress and can trigger mental health challenges.
- **Why it matters:** Breaking the cycle of overthinking helps reduce anxiety and improves your overall emotional well-being.

[. \(https://www.mindhealthgroup.com/blog/how-to-stop-rumination-overthinking/?utm_source=chatgpt.com\).](https://www.mindhealthgroup.com/blog/how-to-stop-rumination-overthinking/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

02

Your Brain Creates Patterns — good or bad

- Overthinking forms neural pathways that reinforce worry and rumination.
- **Why it matters:** Practicing healthy thinking patterns can actually rewire your brain (thanks to neuroplasticity!) to focus better and feel calmer.

[. \(https://www.mindhealthgroup.com/blog/how-to-stop-rumination-overthinking/?utm_source=chatgpt.com\).](https://www.mindhealthgroup.com/blog/how-to-stop-rumination-overthinking/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

03

Overthinking Leads to Procrastination

- When you overanalyze decisions or outcomes, it's harder to take action.
- **Why it matters:** Learning to manage overthinking can help you make faster, more confident choices and stay productive.

[. \(https://bmcpsychology.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40359-024-01761-2?utm_source=chatgpt.com\).](https://bmcpsychology.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40359-024-01761-2?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

04

Overthinking Can Mess With Your Sleep

- Racing thoughts at night keep your brain active when it should be winding down
- **Why it matters:** Tackling overthinking helps you sleep better, which boosts your mood, memory, and focus.

[. \(https://www.psypost.org/bedtime-procrastination-helps-explain-the-link-between-anxiety-and-sleep-problems/?utm_source=chatgpt.com\).](https://www.psypost.org/bedtime-procrastination-helps-explain-the-link-between-anxiety-and-sleep-problems/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

WHY OVERCOMING OVERTHINKING MATTERS

Overthinking may feel like you're solving a problem, but in reality, it often traps you in a mental loop that increases stress and decreases clarity. It activates the default mode network (DMN)—the brain system linked to mind-wandering and self-critical thoughts. When this network is constantly active, it makes it harder to stay present, focused, and emotionally grounded.

Mental Health

Chronic overthinking is strongly linked to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. It creates a cycle of self-doubt and emotional overload, making it hard to feel calm or confident. The longer you stay in this loop, the harder it is to break free from negative thought spirals.

Physical Health:

Overthinking triggers the stress response, increasing levels of cortisol (the stress hormone). This can lead to headaches, fatigue, muscle tension, and even stomach issues. Long-term stress also weakens your immune system and disrupts sleep patterns.

Cognitive Health:

Overthinking clogs up your working memory, making it harder to concentrate, make decisions, or be creative. When your brain is busy spinning on “what-ifs,” it’s harder to stay engaged in school or solve everyday problems clearly

Social Health:

Constant overthinking can make it difficult to speak up in class, try new things, or connect with others—leading to isolation or fear of judgment. It can hold you back from relationships, opportunities, and self-growth.

Learning how to interrupt overthinking helps you protect your brain, calm your body, and build stronger mental and emotional resilience.

Deep Dive

What's Really Happening When You Overthink?

When you're sleep-deprived, your brain struggles to manage emotions. That means you might feel more moody, angry, or anxious than usual. Studies have shown that a lack of sleep can even increase emotional reactivity, meaning you're more likely to get upset over small things.

The solution?

Teaching your brain new responses. Mindfulness, reframing, and grounding practices help you step out of your head and into the present.



KEY TIPS

01 | Notice When You're Overthinking

Why it Matters: Awareness is the first step to interrupting the cycle. You can't fix what you don't notice.

How To:

- Pause and ask, "Am I solving a problem or just looping thoughts?"
- Name it: "This is overthinking." Labeling the thought gives you power over it.
- Use a journal to jot down recurring worries and see patterns.

02 | Ground Yourself in the Present

Why it Matters: Overthinking pulls you into the past or future—grounding brings you back to now.

How To:

- Try the 5-4-3-2-1 method: List 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, 1 thing you taste.
- Do light movement: stretch, walk, shake it out.
- Take deep belly breaths—inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 6.

KEY TIPS

03 | Take a Mental Break

Why it Matters: Breaks reset your brain and reduce the buildup of stressful thoughts.

How To:

- Set a timer for 5 minutes and do something you enjoy (music, art, quick walk).
- Try a brain dump—write everything you're thinking without judgment.
- Practice a mini meditation or listen to calming sounds.

04 | Talk It Out

Why it Matters: Speaking your thoughts aloud can make them feel less overwhelming and more manageable.

How To:

- Vent to a trusted friend, family member, or journal.
- Ask for a reality check—sometimes others can help shift your perspective.
- Use sentence starters like “I’m stuck on...” or “My brain keeps telling me...”

KEY TIPS

05 | Reframe the Thought

Why It Matters: Challenging negative thoughts helps you train your brain to respond in a healthier way.

How To Do It:

- Replace “What if I fail?” with “What if I succeed?”
- Ask: “Is this thought 100% true?” or “What would I say to a friend feeling this way?”
- Write one realistic, positive counter-thought for each negative one.



INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

The Thought Dump + Flip

Objective: To help students recognize their overthinking patterns, release mental clutter, and reframe thoughts with more clarity and calm.

Step 1: The Thought Dump

Instructions: Take 5–10 minutes to do a “mind dump.” Write down every thought that’s on your mind—worries, to-dos, fears, overthinking spirals. Don’t edit or organize—just let it all out.

Examples:

- *"What if I fail the test?"*
- *"Did I say something weird in class?"*
- *"I have so much to do."*



INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

The Thought Dump + Flip

Step 2: Circle the Loops

Look at your list and circle any recurring or spiraling thoughts—these are likely your overthinking patterns.

Hint: *If it starts with "What if..." or loops in circles without a clear solution—it's probably overthinking*

Step 3: Flip the Thought

Choose 1 or 2 overthinking loops and reframe them using this template:

- Overthinking Thought: "What if I mess up my presentation?"
- Flip It: "Even if I make a mistake, I can learn from it and most people won't even notice."

Use one of these Flip Starters if you need help:

- *What's the kindest response i can give myself?*
- *What would my best friend say?*
- *What i can control is...*
- *Even if..*

Step 4: Reflect

Write or discuss:

- How did it feel to get your thoughts out?
- What surprised you when you looked back at your list?
- Did flipping your thought help you feel more calm or clear?

Bonus Tip:

Do a Thought Dump once a week or before a stressful situation to clear your mental space. This is a powerful **emotional reset tool** you can use anytime!

CLASS ACTIVITY

Overthinking Challenge + Group Reframe



Objective:

To help students practice recognizing overthinking and work together to reframe negative or spiraling thoughts, promoting healthy mental habits.

Step 1: Overthinking Group Brainstorm (5–10 minutes)

Instructions:

- In small groups (3–5 students), have each student share one example of something they overthink (it could be about school, friendships, the future, etc.).
- If students are not comfortable sharing their personal examples, they can use general overthinking examples (like “What if I fail the test?” or “What if my friends don’t like me?”).
- Each group writes down 3–5 examples on a piece of paper or whiteboard.

Tip: Emphasize that overthinking often involves thoughts that spiral and are harder to control, so the more honest and open, the better!

CLASS ACTIVITY

Overthinking Challenge + Group Reframe

Step 2: Reframe the Overthinking (10–15 minutes)

- After the brainstorm, have each group choose one overthinking thought from their list to focus on.
- As a group, work together to reframe the thought using positive, practical, or calming responses.

Reframe Prompts:

- "What's the worst-case scenario, and how can I handle it?"
- "What's a more realistic thought to replace this?"
- "What evidence do I have that this thought is not true?"
- "How can I focus on what's in my control?"

Example:

Overthinking thought: "What if I fail the test?" Reframed: "Even if I don't do as well as I want, I can learn from it and improve next time."

Step 3: Share & Reflect (10 minutes)

- Each group shares their reframed thought with the class.
- After sharing, have a short class reflection discussion:
 - How did it feel to reframe the thought as a group?
 - Did anyone feel relieved after hearing other perspectives?
 - What was the hardest part of the reframing process?

Step 4: Quick Movement Break (5 minutes)

- To help clear the mind and reset, do a quick movement break to break up the activity. Try some simple stretches or a 2-minute dance challenge.

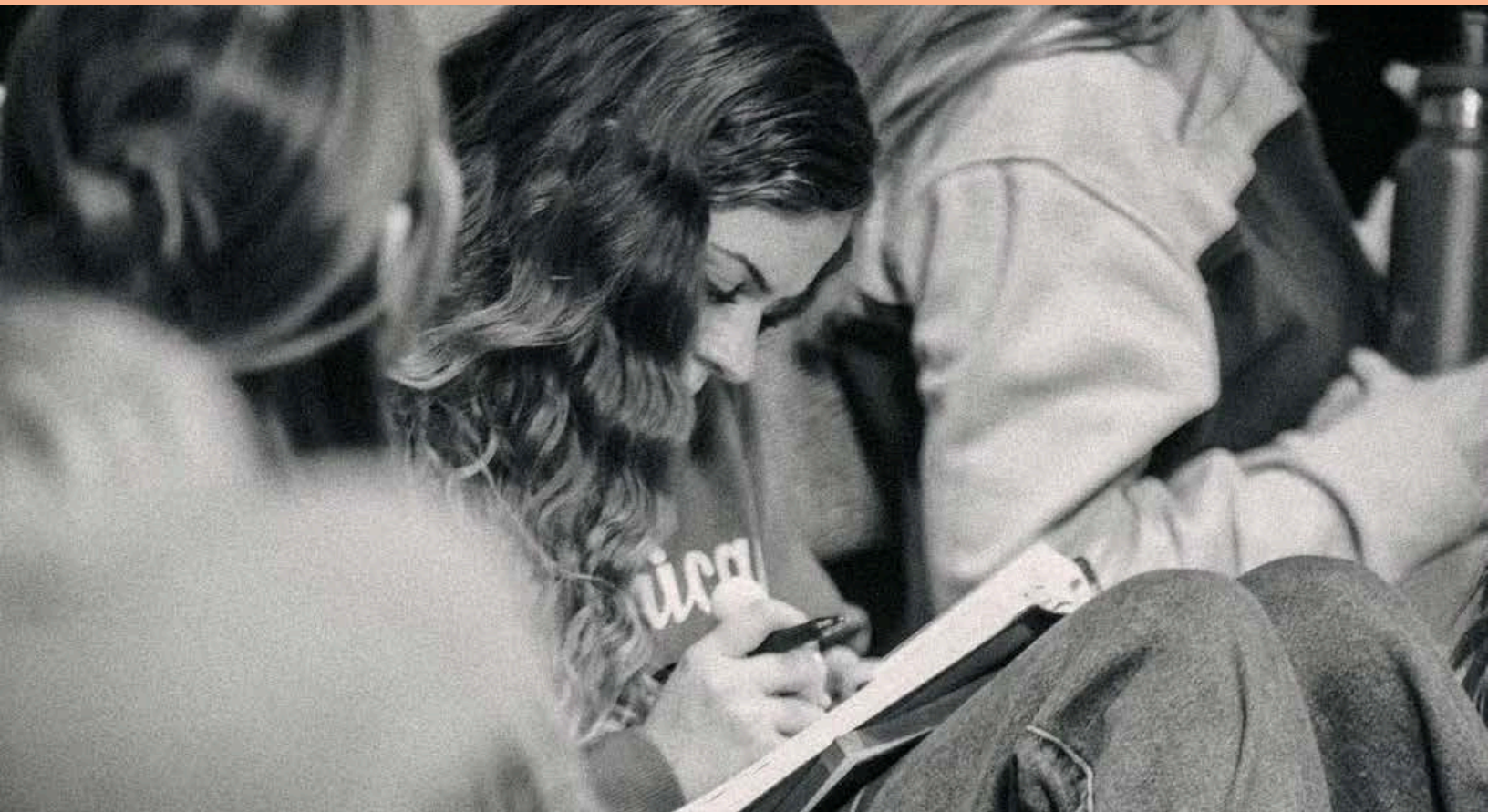
CLASS ACTIVITY

Overthinking Challenge + Group Reframe

Closing Thoughts:

- Overthinking can feel overwhelming, but when we share and reframe it together, we can see things more clearly.
- Encourage students to use this activity with a friend or in the moment when they start to feel overwhelmed with their thoughts.

This group activity fosters both individual and collaborative problem-solving, helping students feel supported while learning practical ways to deal with overthinking.



TEACHER SELF-CARE ACTIVITY

The 3-Minute Thought Reset

Purpose: To help teachers break out of spiraling thoughts, reduce mental clutter, and create space for calm, focused thinking—even in the middle of a busy school day.

Step 1: Name the Overthinking (1 minute)

Take a moment to ask yourself:

“What’s the story I’m stuck in right now?”

Write down the thought that keeps looping (ex: “I’m not doing enough,” “What if this lesson flops,” “Did I handle that student the right way?”). Pro tip: Keep a small notepad or notes app for these moments.

Step 2: Break the Loop (1 minute)

Use this mini mental exercise:

Ask: “Is this a **fact, a fear, or a feeling**?”

Then: “What do I actually have control over right now?”

This helps separate what’s real from what’s imagined—and brings your mind back to the present.

Step 3: Reframe & Refocus (1 minute)

Choose one of these reframes or write your own:

“I’m doing the best I can with what I have today.”

“This one moment doesn’t define me.”

“What’s one small thing I can do right now to move forward?”

Breathe deeply, and let the new thought settle.

TEACHER SELF-CARE ACTIVITY

The 3-Minute Thought Reset



The 3-Minute Thought Reset (*Cont.*)

Optional Add-On: Movement + Breath

If you have time, take a short walk, stretch your arms up, or simply **take 3 deep, slow breaths**—inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth.

Why It Works:

This practice interrupts the overthinking spiral by:

- Naming and labeling the thought (activates the logical brain)
- Focusing on what's in your control (restores agency)
- Reframing the thought (shifts the emotional tone)
- Pairing it with breath or movement (calms the nervous system)

Reminder:

You're allowed to pause. You're allowed to reset. Overthinking doesn't mean you're failing—it means you care. This is just one way to take care of yourself back.

KEY ADVICE

“I can think my way out of overthinking.”

Why this myth is wrong:

Overthinking often disguises itself as “problem-solving.” But in reality, it’s circular thinking—going over the same thoughts without new outcomes.

What to do instead:

Shift from thinking to action. Rather than trying to “solve” the thought, take a small step forward—talk to someone, write it out, or do a physical task. Action creates clarity.

Give Your Brain a “Worry Window”

What it is:

Instead of letting worry take over your whole day, **schedule a 10-minute time slot** to write down or think about your worries

Why it works:

This tricks your brain into knowing there’s a designated space for overthinking, which reduces how much it intrudes at other times.

How to use it: “I’ll worry about this at 8 p.m. for 10 minutes.” During the window, jot down your thoughts. Once time’s up, close the notebook or walk away. (It gives your thoughts boundaries.)

KEY ADVICE

Labeling Thoughts Softens Their Power

Why it matters:

Overthinking often feels overwhelming because thoughts blend with emotions. But when you label a thought ("That's a fear," "That's a judgment"), it activates the logical part of your brain and puts distance between you and the thought

How to try it:

- When a thought shows up, pause and label:
 - "That's a worry."
 - "That's a memory replay."
 - "That's a prediction."
- Then ask: "Is it helpful? Is it true?"

It builds **mindful awareness** and stops the emotional snowball.



CONCLUSION

Don't Believe Everything You Think

Overthinking is something we all experience, but it doesn't have to run the show. The more you learn to recognize your thoughts, pause before spiraling, and take small actions forward, the more power you take back. Remember: your thoughts are not facts—they're just thoughts. With practice, you can quiet the noise, trust yourself more, and find peace in the present moment. You've got the tools—now take a deep breath, and start using them.



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