

# Peer-Powered Mental Health Curriculum for High Schools **CONTENT OVERVIEW**



## Active Minds

Active Minds is the nation's leading nonprofit organization supporting mental health promotion and education of youth and young adults. Powered by a network of more than 1000 schools, workplaces, and communities, and through a vast public audience, Active Minds is creating communities of support and saving lives.



## Overview of the Active Minds Peer-Powered Mental Health Curriculum for High Schools

This curriculum empowers and prepares high school students with knowledge and skills to start conversations about mental health. The discussion guides in this curriculum can be facilitated in classrooms or to enhance mental health programming of [Active Minds' high school chapters](#). This program is designed to empower high school students using Active Minds' proven peer-to-peer approach. It is meant to help leaders (students, teachers, administrators, or staff members) create a space for students to discuss mental well-being by encouraging an open, nonjudgmental, and honest discourse. We hope this curriculum will:

1. Reduce barriers to initiate and continue conversations about mental health.
2. Open a conversation about how mental health affects all of us.
3. Provide a sense of connection among students and their high school community regarding mental health.

The Active Minds Peer-Powered Mental Health Curriculum for High Schools is designed to be fluid, iterative, and in support of building a better world. Many students, especially Active Minds chapter members, appreciate Active Minds’ approach to mental health. It doesn’t feel like another class they are taking. Rather, they are learning by engaging with their peers. Active Minds students feel part of a community committed to mental health and their power to create change. High schools do not need to have an Active Minds chapter to use this curriculum. This curriculum supports these conversations with tailored resources, a structure, and open-ended questions within five focus areas:

<u>Action</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Awareness</u>
<u>Connection</u>	<u>Community</u>	

This curriculum is rooted in mental health literacy and social emotional development and is aligned with the following standards/competencies:

- [CASEL’s SEL Framework](#) (the five core competencies include: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, Relationship skills, and Responsible decision-making)
- [American School Counselor Association \(ASCA\) Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success](#)
- The [National Health Education Standards \(NHES\)](#)

## Using the Curriculum

This curriculum provides a series of discussion guides to be used with student groups of any size when and where they meet, in or outside of the classroom. While there is no set structure or flow of selecting discussion guides to present to your group, we recommend starting with the “We All Have Mental Health” and Validate-Appreciate-Refer (V-A-R)<sup>®</sup> discussion guides. From there your administrators may decide which discussion guide is relevant and appropriate. Every school community is unique, with different strengths, concerns, and challenges. As such, you may want to review all the discussion guides in advance and align them with your school and community needs.

## Included Discussion Guides and Learning Objectives

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### 1. Facilitator's Guide

### 2. Student Facilitator Guide

### 3. We All Have Mental Health

- a. Students will be able to speak about Active Minds role in affecting young adult mental health while also raising awareness and spreading Active Minds' mission.
- b. Students will be able to know the difference between emotional wellbeing and mental health and their relationship to each other.

### 4. Validate-Appreciate-Refer (V-A-R)<sup>®</sup>

- a. Students will develop conversation starters to help a friend with their mental health.
- b. Students will be able to help their peers by engaging in everyday conversations about mental health.

### 5. When It's More Than a Bad Day

- a. Students will be able to identify signs, symptoms, and outcomes of stress and anxiety.
- b. Students will know the difference between helpful (eustress) and harmful (distress) stress.

### 6. You Are Not Alone

- a. Students will know the signs of loneliness and the connection between loneliness and mental health.
- b. Students will be able to develop strategies to address loneliness for their peers.

### 7. Here For You

- a. Students will be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of depression.
- b. Students will be able to identify strategies to address depression and sadness for their peers.

### 8. The Power of Being Positive

- a. Students will be able to articulate the relationship between self-esteem and mental health.
- b. Students will recognize the value of increasing self-esteem and positive self-perception.

## **9. Let's Talk About Mental Health**

- a. Students will be able to identify the role of stigma in mental health conversation, diagnosis, and treatment.
- b. Students will develop strategies to reduce stigma amongst themselves, their peers, and in their communities.

## **10. Connecting in a Virtual World**

- a. Students will acknowledge the role of technology in our society and its positive and negative effects on mental health.
- b. Students will recognize the benefits and detriments of their own internet, social media, and technology use.

## **11. Understanding Mental Health Crises**

- a. Students will be able to recognize warning signs of a mental health crisis.
- b. Students will identify national resources to support individuals prior to and during a mental health crisis.

## **12. Staying (Mental) Healthy**

- a. Students will be able to articulate the benefits of self-care for themselves and others.
- b. Students will develop a self-care plan with healthy coping strategies to support their mental health.

## **13. Helping a Friend**

- a. Students will be able to acknowledge their role in assisting their peers in managing their mental health.
- b. Students will determine strategies to help their peers manage their mental health.

## **14. Making Responsible Choices**

- a. Students will be able to articulate the relationship between substance use and misuse and mental health.
- b. Students will identify strategies to prevent substance use and misuse.

## **15. No Need to Be Perfect**

- a. Students will be able to define the role of perfection and failure for themselves.
- b. Students will develop healthy coping strategies for when expectations do not meet reality.