



# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS & SUICIDE PREVENTION

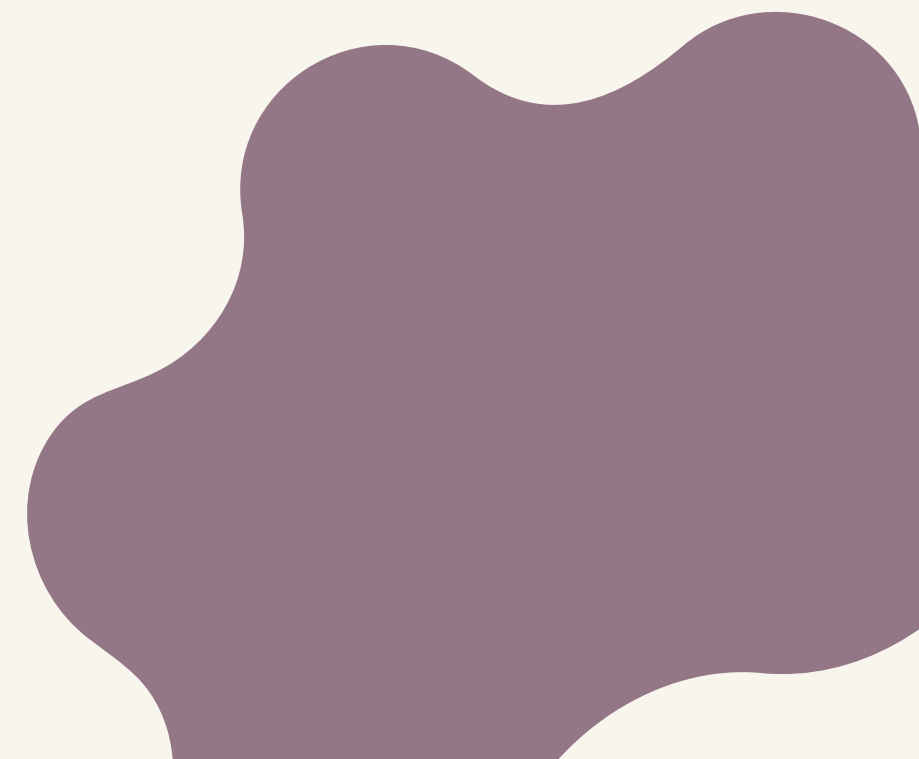
*Anna Riley, School Social Worker*

On this  
**SHEEP-SCALE,**  
how do you feel  
today?

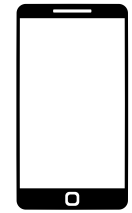


# Who am I?

- Anna Riley, ACSW, PPSC
- School Social Worker
- Half time at Pacific Trails Middle School, half time at Oak Crest Middle School



# In the chat: Write the number(s) you have observed



## 1. Electronics

Child is constantly on their phone or other devices; argues/gets upset when device is taken.



## 2. Moodiness

Child's mood switches frequently and quickly, sometimes with no trigger.



## 3. Withdrawing

Child spends a lot more time in their bedroom and less time socializing with the family.



## 4. Talking back/arguing

Child is more argumentative and talks back to parents/other adults.



# Learning objectives:



- Mental Health Common Symptoms
  - Anxiety and depression
  - Red flags to look out for
- Suicide prevention strategies for parents
- How to help your child thrive
  - Coping tools and modeling
- How and when to get extra help/resources
- Questions/comments

# Mental Health



- Mental Health is about our feelings, thinking, emotions and moods.
- Everyone has a mental health, and it is normal for mental health to change during times of stress. Positive mental health does not mean always being happy, but it does mean feeling empowered to talk about, cope and overcome the things we encounter in life.

# Types of Feelings

FEEL  
YOUR  
FEEL  
INGS

Everyday  
Feelings



- Feelings come and go and are a normal reaction of what is happening in our lives. They are always changing and do not linger for too long.

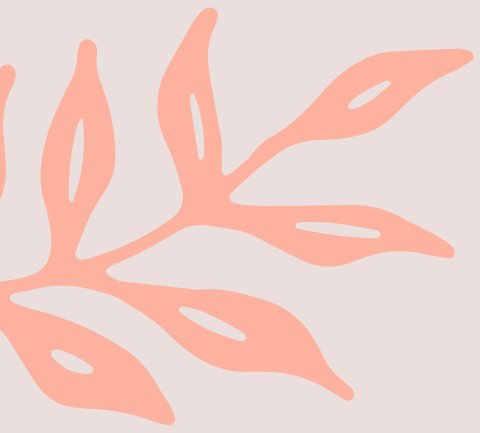
Overwhelming  
feelings



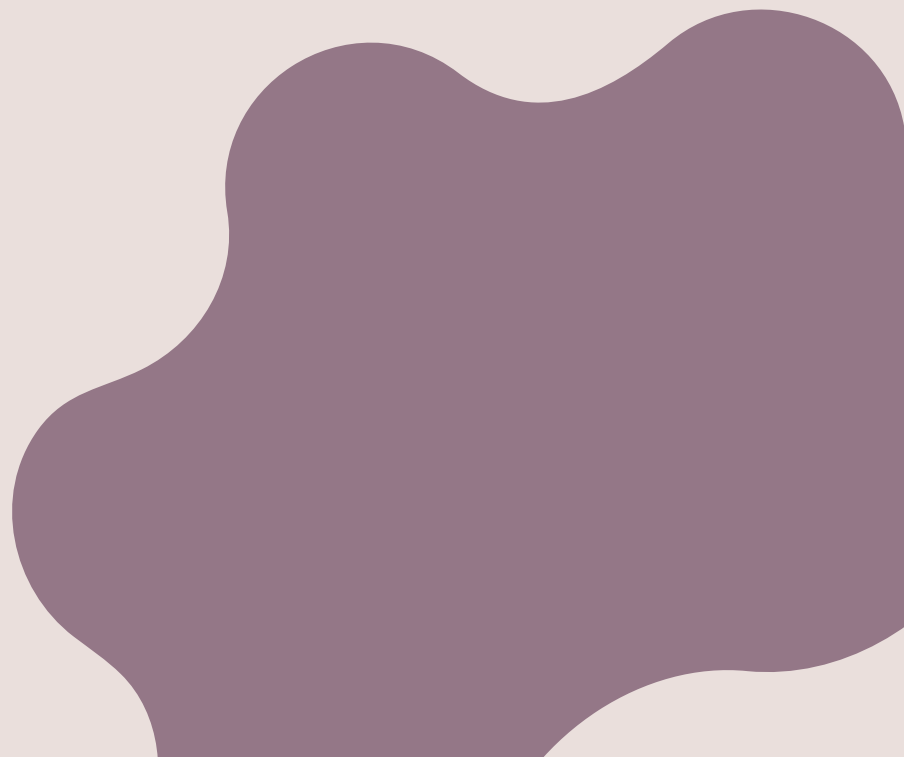

- Hang around for a long time, change the way we feel and act and may stop us from doing what we want to do in life.



# According to the CDC:



For adolescents, depression, substance use and suicide are important concerns. In 2018-2019, of adolescents aged 12-17:

- 15.1% had a major depressive episode
  - 36.7% had persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness
  - 4.1% had a substance use disorder
  - 18.8% seriously considered attempting suicide
  - 8.9% attempted suicide
- 
- 



# Anxiety



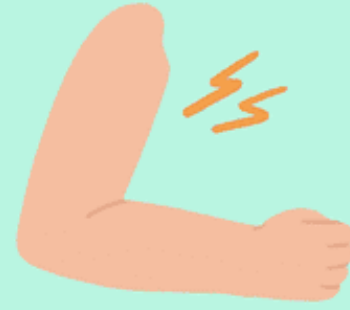
- Child does not outgrow fears and worries that are typical in children
- Fear or worries begin to interfere with school, home, or social activities



# Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) Symptoms



**Excessive anxiety and worry**



**Increased muscle aches or soreness**



**Impaired concentration**



**Fatigue**



**Irritability**



**Restlessness**



**Difficulty sleeping**

# How does Generalized Anxiety Disorder Present in School



Absences

Perfectionist

Avoids  
difficult  
tasks

Unwilling  
to  
participate

Withdrawal  
from others

Perceived as  
unmotivated, lazy,  
or uninterested

Inattention

Fatigue

# We all experience anxiety, but how do we know when it's more severe?

## Anxiety disorder

- ✓ It often happens out of the blue.
- ✓ It's persistent, even if there's no real threat.
- ✓ It interferes with daily life, keeping you from socializing, working or sleeping.

## Normal worry

- ✓ Nervousness is tied to a specific cause, such as an upcoming test or work deadline.
- ✓ It's fleeting and usually passes when the challenge is over.
- ✓ It doesn't interfere with daily life.

# Depression



- Child is sad or uninterested in things they used to enjoy
- Persistent sadness and hopelessness



# Symptoms/Signs



## Cognitive

- "All or none thinking"
- Low Self-Esteem
- Attention Problems
- Helpless/Hopeless
- Memory Problems
- Difficulty Making Decisions
- Suicidal Thoughts



## Behavioral

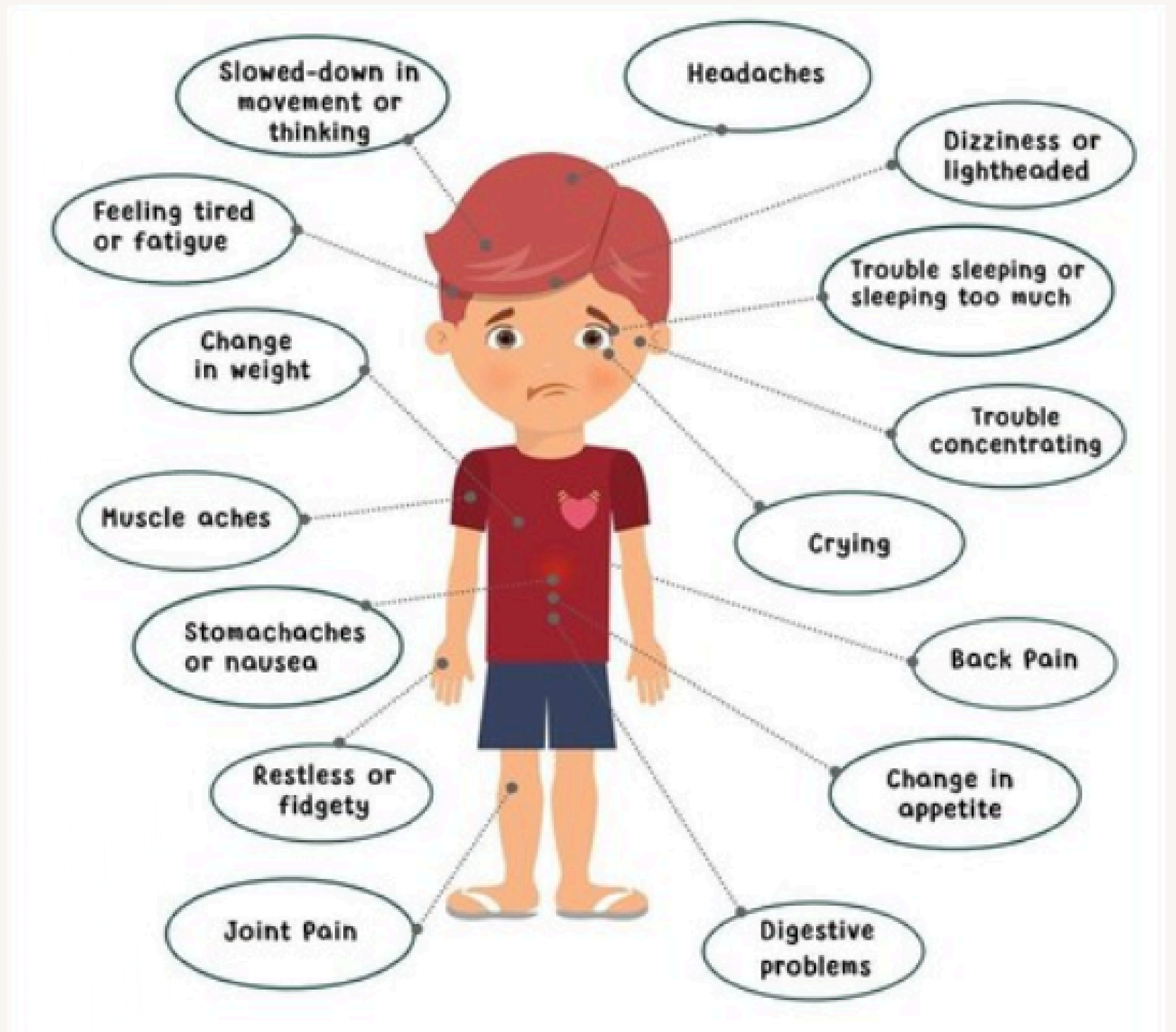
- Low Affect
- Appears detached
- Limited Effort
- Uncooperative
- Irritability
- Crying for no apparent reason
- Social Withdrawal
- Does not participate in usual activities
- Decline in self-care/appearance



## Physiological

- Somatic complaints
- Poor Appetite or Overeating
- Insomnia or Hypersomnia
- Low Energy/Fatigue

# Symptoms and Body Signals





# Effects on Learning in School

Lacking  
motivation

Rage &  
irritability

Fatigue

Difficulty  
concentrating

Loss of  
appetite

Harms  
academic  
performance



Impacts  
memory

Strained  
relationships






# Behavior to look out for

- Missing days in school or poor school performance
  - Avoiding friends and social life
  - Losing interest or not having motivation in activities (even fun ones!)
  - Sleeping way too much or not enough
  - Not sitting still or focusing on tasks
  - Seeming chronically anxious or worried
  - Lacking energy or oversleeping
- 
- 



# Behavior to look out for continued...

- Bouncing between moods of no-energy and hyperactivity
  - Actions of self-harm, including cutting, picking, burning, biting, or hair pulling
  - Having suicidal thoughts or actions
  - Being irritable or unreasonable constantly
  - Engaging in manic and risky behavior such as drugs, unsafe sex, or dangerous thrill-seeking activities
  - Thinking an external entity is controlling their thoughts/actions or hearing voices
  - Smoking, taking drugs, or drinking
- 

# Suicide Prevention



**Know the warning signs**



**Ask directly: “Are you thinking about suicide?”**



**Make a safety plan and reduce access to lethal means**



**Connection to MH professional trained in suicide prevention treatments (DBT, CAMS, etc.)**



**Create systems to respond to suicide risk in least restrictive (least traumatizing) way**

# Risk Factors for Suicide

Death of  
a loved  
one

Bullying

Mental  
health  
issue

Substance  
Abuse

Access to  
means

Relationship  
problems

Previous  
suicide  
attempts

Trauma

# Protective Factors



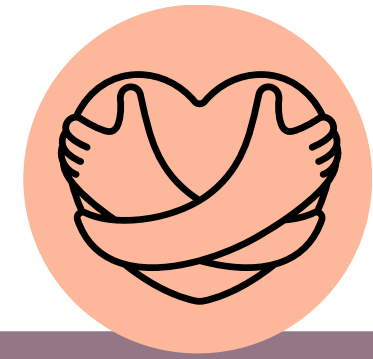
Access to  
mental health  
care



Connectedness  
to family,  
friends,  
community



Life skills,  
including  
coping skills



Self esteem and  
sense of  
purpose



# Critical Warning Signs

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Making plans for suicide, or looking for ways to kill oneself (purchasing a gun, stockpiling pills, etc.)
- Talking, posting or writing about death, dying, or suicide



## Other Warning Signs

- Look out for all of the depression warning signs and any major, random changes in behavior
- 
- 

# Have a Conversation

- Tell your child what you have noticed/why you are concerned
- Be willing to listen and validate
- Ask the question: Are you thinking about suicide?
  - Talking about suicide does not increase suicidal behavior. It's good to be direct and open, because it sends a message that you care and want to help
- If they say "yes," thank them for their honesty, remain calm, and tell them you are there to help them feel better

# What to do Next

- If your child is in immediate danger, call 911
- Depending on the level of severity, next steps may include calling a crisis hotline, local crisis center, a mental health professional, or family doctor
- The school can also offer support during school hours if you contact and let them know the situation
- Find your child mental health treatment if needed
- **Overall, have your child evaluated by a professional who has training in suicide prevention**



# How to Help Your Child Thrive



# Advice for Parents



Avoid criticism or sarcasm when your child doesn't perform well



Avoid comparing your child to their siblings or peers



Emphasize effort over performance



Set a positive tone before and after school

# What to Do

- Encourage kids to talk about their feelings
- **NORMALIZE** anxiety; we can still do things even when we are super anxious about them
- Listen if they are willing to talk and let them know you are there for them if they do not want to talk
- Help kids understand their anxiety triggers
- Set a calm example; try to keep your fears to yourself
- Limit access to upsetting news/stories
- Set reasonable expectations, limits, and consequences. Be predictable!
- Work together as a family
- Schedule quality time/laughter/joy with family

# What Not to Do

- Say "don't worry" or "calm down"
- Change routine frequently or not have a routine
- Over-schedule kids
- Over-express your own anxieties (COVID, relationship issues, world events)
- Over-discuss feelings/anxieties before trigger situations
- Enable unhealthy behaviors
  - An important step in managing anxiety involves facing feared situations, places or objects. It is normal to want to avoid the things you fear. However, avoidance prevents you from learning that the things you fear are not as dangerous as you think. The process of facing fears is called EXPOSURE. This is a process that occurs over time and there likely will be setbacks (Example: school avoidance will not help anxiety; only makes it harder)



# What can I do to support my student?

- Ask - Don't be afraid to ask how your child is doing/feeling. It will not make it worse.
- Listen - Don't minimize, don't become defensive or take it personally. Be a safe place.
- Model - Honor honesty and vulnerability, validate your student's feelings.
- Teach - Share what helps you cope in times of stress and teach your student.



# What can I do to support my student?

*Talk to your student*

I notice \_\_\_\_\_.

I care about you.

It's not your fault.

You deserve to feel better.

Do you feel like you want to talk to someone else about your problem?

I am worried about your mental wellness.



# Build a Toolkit

**Positive self talk**

**Challenge negative thoughts**

**Coping Skills**

# Common coping skills

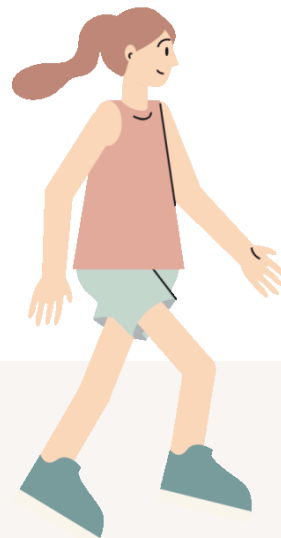
1

**DEEP  
BREATHING**



2

**TAKE A  
BREAK/  
WALK**



3

**DRAW/  
COLOR**





# Emphasize and model healthy habits



Get some type of exercise each day (walk, run, yoga, bike)



Get 8+ hours of sleep each night



Limit screen time and social media



Practice coping skills (deep breathing, listen to music, read a book)



# Teach Your Child How to Breathe

**01**

**Sit up straight, place hands on stomach.**

Take a deep breath in and count to 4.

**02**

**Feel your stomach expand with air.**

Count to 4 again while holding your breath.

**03**

**Release and feel your stomach flatten.**

Breathe out through your mouth while saying "Ahhh"

# Make a Plan

Example (for school-based anxiety):



Step 1: Try to self-regulate in class by deep breathing, imagining happy place, and drinking water



Step 2: Ask teacher for a break (step outside, go to bathroom, splash water on face)



Step 3: Ask teacher to go to the counseling office



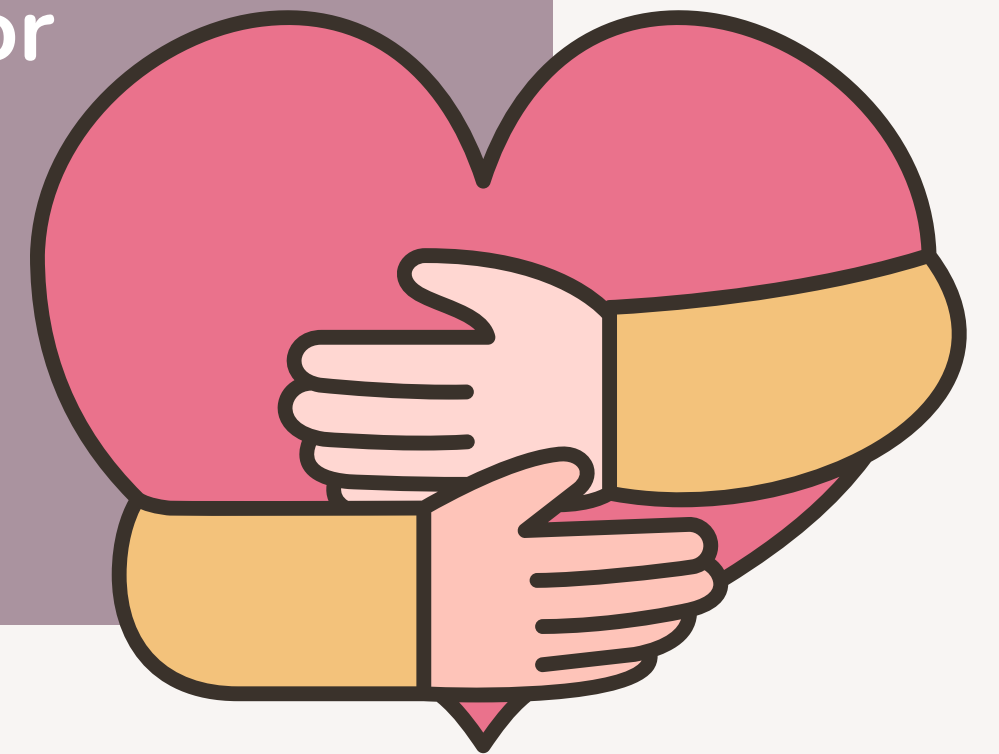
Step 4: Call parent if unable to calm down with adult support

# When to Get Additional Help

- Student's behaviors are interfering with life activities
- Student causing significant/repeated disruption in classroom
- Student escalating others' behavior
- Student self-injuring
- Student is withdrawn and is avoiding activities
- Student becoming suicidal/threatening others
- Things to consider: length of time, frequency, intensity

# When Seeking Support with a Professional

- I am concerned because \_\_\_\_\_
- I heard my student say \_\_\_\_\_
- I saw my student do \_\_\_\_\_
- My student is feeling \_\_\_\_\_
- This is not my student's usual behavior
- I've seen the change in my student's behavior within the last few (days/weeks).



# Know Your Options

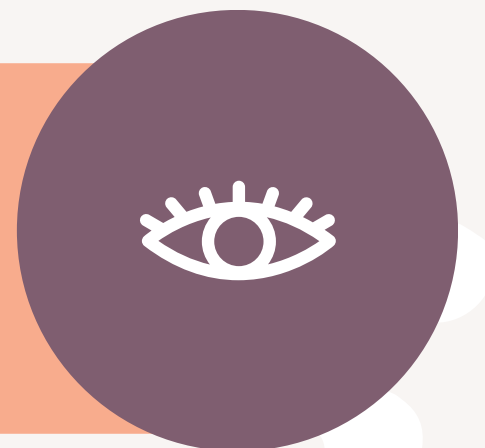
School support: Teachers, Counselors (go here first for mental health concerns!), Student Support Facilitator SSW, Administration



Outside support: Therapy and group support



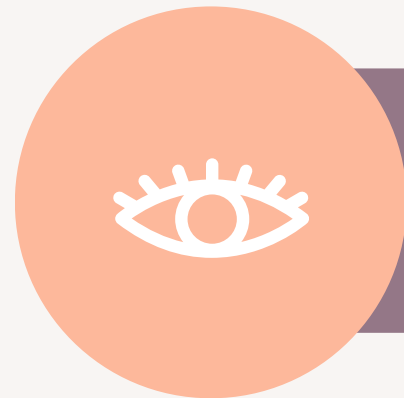
Medication: Psychiatry appointment



# Additional Resources



Calm App



Youtube (search: meditation, guided visualization, progressive muscle relaxation)



Headspace App



## **Thank you! Any questions?**

**If you have a concern about your child's mental health, please reach out to their Counselor. The Counselor will refer to me as appropriate.**