

Feelings & “What Got You Through” Brainstorms

Recommended Age: 12+

Goals

- To relate youth to others who may be dealing with a mental illness or going through a hard time.
- To reduce stigma and define empathy by exemplifying that we can all relate to difficult feelings and offer support.
- To explore what gets you through and show the difference between coping that heals and that which numbs (e.g., self-medicating).
- To provide youth with local resources.

Have Ready

- Flipchart papers with ‘Feelings during a hard time?’ and ‘What got you through?’ (x2) written at the top.
- Markers.

Instructions for ‘Feelings’

- **Introduce the topic of mental health.** We all have mental health, and, just like our physical health, we must work towards mental wellness. What do you think we mean by mental wellness? **Mental wellness is a balance of mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional parts of ourselves.**¹ It is also the ability to deal with stresses and challenges while living a full and creative life. **We talk about mental health because stress is common during the teenage years, and we all must learn how to cope with stress and difficult feelings to be mentally well. The sooner we can get support and resources, the better we are able to cope.** Tell youth we are going to talk about mental health, mental illness, and mental wellness. **Provide a disclaimer, mentioning these issues can be hard to talk about and that it is okay for them to draw, ‘zone out,’ etc.**
- As a large group brainstorm, explain that we are going to think of some of the feelings that might come up during a difficult or hard

time (e.g., when there's a loss, a breakup, or when preparing for a difficult task such as an exam or a big game). Ask youth, **“What are some of the feelings that could come up when someone is having that hard time?”** Flipchart their responses.

Sample Flipchart

Feelings During a Hard Time

- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| • Sad | Resilient |
| • Alone/Isolated | Strong |
| • Depressed | Capable |
| • Anxious | |
| • Scared | |
| • Guilt | |
| • Hurt/Pain | |
| • Confused | |
| • Angry | |
| • Powerless | |

‘Feelings’ Debrief

- Ask youth, **“Who here has felt most of these feelings?”** These feelings are common feelings, meaning that most of us have experienced these feelings at one time or another in our lives, so we can relate to others who are dealing with these emotions.
- Ask youth, **“Are any of these feelings bad, or wrong?”** (No)
- For some of us, these feelings are triggered by specific events (a loved one dying or getting sick, losing a game, failing a test, breaking up with a partner, etc.). **However, sometimes the reason for the pain is not visible to those around us, which can often be the case with mental illness. This can lead to misunderstandings or even minimizing of what someone is going through.**
- **Although it may be confusing to understand the source of these feelings, it is important to acknowledge that all feelings are real and valid. So, even if we have not been through what someone else has been through, we know what it's like to need support and understanding from others.**

- **Suffering is not equal. Some people have been through or go through more than others do for reasons beyond their control.** For example, those who have had hard childhoods or those who have experienced trauma in their lives may feel hard emotions more intensely than someone who has grown up with a lot of support and no traumatic experiences. Someone who has to cope with racism or other forms of discrimination on a daily basis may have different triggers than people who have more privilege in the same way. **All feelings are valid, no matter where they come from.**
- **We all experience feelings of being anxious or depressed sometimes. Some people also live with mental illnesses of depression or anxiety.** If the feelings don't seem to pass or are impacting day-to-day needs, talk to a trusted adult. A mental illness may add challenges to our mental health, but **people can and do recover or find ways to thrive with a mental illness.** It just might take a little more support.
- While it is not a competition, it is good to recognize that some people need more support and understanding. For example, depression and anxiety are the two most common mental health issues for people your age. **Finding more supports and taking extra steps for mental wellness might be necessary for anyone who is living with anxiety and/or depression.** This could include talking to a supportive person regularly, seeing a counsellor, going to a support group, taking medications, doing exercises that work for them, and having a specialized plan in place for when they need it. There are lots of ways to support each other.
- Sometimes, even though we are going through a hard time, we may still feel strong or have hope knowing that we will get through it because we've gotten through the other hard times before. When we recover from a tough time, we call it 'resiliency' and people can be amazingly resilient. **Asking for help with a hard time helps us build inner strength and support and can make it easier to ask for help in the future.**
- Note: If youth bring up thoughts of suicide, it is important to respond appropriately. Acknowledge that sometimes when people have been feeling sad, depressed, or hopeless for a long time, they may start to think about suicide. Reinforce suicide prevention

messages: **it is important to talk to an adult you trust and not keep it a secret if someone is thinking about suicide.** For more information, please refer to the Suicide Prevention section of the corresponding chapter in the Teen Talk Service Provider Manual.

Instructions for ‘What got you through?’

- Divide youth into two groups and give each group a ‘What got you through?’ flipchart.
- Explain to the groups that we know hard times are going to happen in our lives, so it makes sense to try to figure out healthy ways to get through those hard times or to cope with them. These can take some time and work to develop, but can really help us.
- Ask the group, **“When thinking about a hard time, what helped you get through?”** Have them write their ideas on the flipcharts.

Sample Flipchart

What got you through?

- **Talk to someone you trust:** a friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor, etc.
- Hang out with friends/others/family
- Cry, laugh, and get hugs
- Do something creative, draw, paint, or play music
- Talk to people/have conversations
- Write down your feelings in a letter, journal, blog, or diary
- Go see a medical doctor, Elder, spiritual leader for care, etc.
- Go for a walk/connect to nature
- Watch movies
- Play videogames
- Play sports, dance, sing
- Go for a bike ride
- Read poetry or create your own
- Build or fix something
- Masturbate
- Spend time alone/get to know yourself
- Meditate or pray
- Attend ceremonies

- Use positive self-talk
- Practice mindfulness/deep breathing
- Take part in cultural practices

‘What got you through?’ Debrief

- Have the groups read out their lists if they feel comfortable, or if not, you read the lists to the whole group. Validate that there are lots of ways people get through tough times.
- If substance use appears on the list: We have to acknowledge that substance use or self-medicating is a choice some people make to avoid challenging feelings. Discuss key harm reduction tips like drinking water, taking breaks, being somewhere safe, etc. Avoid shaming the group, but also acknowledge it can potentially lead to problems like addiction. Substances and self-medicating can numb all feelings, both ‘negative’ (e.g., shame, guilt) and ‘positive’ (e.g., joy, hope). Be sure to highlight that increasing other activities and resources on the list can help someone who is trying to use less substances or less often. Note: If youth bring up self-harm, encourage them not to judge and add in healthier ways of coping. Finding new/additional ways to get through difficult times can help people reduce risks and may be more useful in the long run. For more information on self-harm, please see the corresponding chapter of the Teen Talk Service Provider Manual.
- Some ways of coping allow us to reflect and/or release our feelings (e.g., talking, journaling, making music, art, etc.), and others help us to distract, numb, or avoid feelings (e.g., shopping, reading books, watching television, playing video games, playing sports, etc.). Ideally, we do both reflective and engaging activities, as well as distancing or distracting activities, when dealing with difficult or stressful times.
- We don’t only want to reflect on our hard time because that can be exhausting, but if we only distract from our problems then we may not work through our feelings. This is why we need both.
- Beyond reflecting and distracting activities, it is helpful to have a variety of coping skills. It can be good to think about activities that you can do by yourself, that you can do with other people, that do not cost money, that do cost money, that are quick, that take some

time, that take effort, and that are easy. That way, we have a mix of things to pull from.ⁱⁱ

- Ask youth, **“Who needs coping skills and people to support them?”** (Everyone.)

Provide Resources

- Talking about feelings and coping can be a heavy topic and may bring up personal issues for some youth. Provide youth with local resources where they can go if they want to talk to someone. Examples are guidance counsellor, teacher, mental health worker, Elder, Traditional healer, or crisis lines (Klinik Crisis Line: 1.800.322.3019, Kids Help Phone: 1.800.668.6868 and Kids Text Line: text *connect* to 686868, Manitoba Suicide Prevention and Support Line: 1.877.435.7170, First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line: 1.855.242.3310, Sexual Assault Crisis Line: 1.888.292.7565, Manitoba Farm, Rural & Northern Support Line: 1.866.367.3276).
- When in Winnipeg, youth can access Klinik Drop-In Counselling: 204.784.4067, Youth Mobile Crisis Unit: 204.949.4777, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Program Centralized Intake: 204.958.9600 through referral by a teacher, counsellor, or yourself without a doctor’s note, no fee for service.
- When in Brandon, youth can access Child & Adolescent Treatment Centre (CATC): 204.578.2700 or toll-free: 1.866.403.5459.
- It can be difficult talking to friends, counsellors, or crisis lines about issues that are going on in our lives, but it can be helpful. Crisis line workers are counsellors who are trained to offer support and help. They understand that calling and sharing is a hard thing to do. They will wait with the person, and they won’t hang up if the person is silent or crying.
- These services are free, mostly youth-friendly, and try to be non-judgmental. Encourage youth to keep trying if they don’t find one of these places or people to be helpful. Sometimes, we have to try a few different resources before we find one we are comfortable with. FYI: Though Youth Mobile Crisis, a service available in certain areas of the province, offers confidential phone calls, there are certain criteria that must be met for workers to visit a youth in person.

- FYI: The Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre (MATC) has mental health clinicians that provide mental health services via Telehealth to children and youth who are experiencing emotional difficulties in 11 Manitoba First Nation communities. They accept referrals from service providers and community professionals, such as guidance counsellors, directly. Youth under 16 require parental consent, but there is no limit to the number of sessions provided. Call 1.855.413.7855 for referral forms and information.

ⁱHealth Canada. (2015). First Nations mental wellness continuum framework: Summary report. In *Thunderbird Partnership Foundation* (pp. 1–10). Health Canada.
<https://thunderbirdpf.org/fnmwc-summary-report/>

ⁱⁱKatz, L. (2016, May). [Presentation].