

Helping a Friend Practice Cards

Recommended Age: 12-14

Goal

- To develop empathy skills and build help-seeking behaviours.
- To recognize warning signs of depression, anxiety, or trauma.

Have Ready

- Choose 4-6 cards based on time and group size.

Instructions

- Explain that you have cards with different situations a friend could go through. Ask youth to brainstorm ways to support this friend that are non-judgmental and connect to help.
- Hand out discussion cards to youth in groups of 3-5.
- Allow youth a few minutes to talk in their groups. Debrief each card as a classroom by asking each group to share their thoughts.

Cards and Key Points of Debrief:

Note: Cards bolded, followed by debrief talking points. Validate any feelings and supportive approaches the youth come up with.

“Your friend seems tired all the time and doesn’t seem interested in doing things like they used to. They often cancel plans you’ve made together. How would you support them? What sort of feelings might be happening for them?”

- Sometimes, when someone is going through a bad time or is stressed out, it can make them more tired or withdraw.
- When someone cancels all the time, it can be frustrating, but if someone is struggling with their mental health, it is important to let them know we care and to continue to let them know they are welcome.
- We all get sad and low sometimes, but if this goes on for a while, it may be a sign of depression. Depression can be treated, but they may need extra support from a counsellor or other trusted adult.

“Your friend says they feel worried all the time, almost like their thoughts are racing. It’s making it hard to concentrate. They can’t seem to shake this feeling. How would you support them? What sort of feelings might be happening for them?”

- Stress can make it hard to concentrate. This could be a sign they need someone to talk to about what is going on, some support on letting commitments go, or some fun to relieve stress.
- It sounds like they feel anxious. We all feel anxious sometimes. Since the feeling isn’t going away, it may also be a sign of anxiety, a type of mental illness. People can learn to manage their anxiety, but they may need extra support from a counsellor or other trusted adult.

“Your friend seems short-tempered all morning and distracted. As you sit down for lunch, they start to cry. How would you support them? What sort of feelings might be happening for them?”

- It sounds like something is going on with your friend. Check in and ask if they’d like to talk. Remember, listening without judgment is an important way to support someone going through a hard time.
- Share resources like the Kids Help Phone or support them in talking to a trusted adult. You could go together to their favourite teacher or the school counsellor.
- Ask if they need a hug or share some food with them.

“Your friend recently broke up with their partner. They seem upset by the situation and have started to spread rumours about their ex. How would you support them? What sort of feelings might be happening for them?”

- It can feel hard to go through a breakup. Talk with your friend about their feelings and offer support, such as hanging out, sharing food, making jokes, and listening to them. Connect them with additional supports or share resources.
- Remind them that it is okay to feel upset, but that it is never okay to spread rumours like this. As a friend, they are more likely to listen to you.
- Check in with their ex as well to see if they are okay.

“Your friend was recently in a car accident. Ever since then, they avoid driving anywhere and recently mentioned regularly having bad dreams about being in a car. How would you support them? What sort of feelings might be happening for them?”

- Sometimes, when we go through unexpected, violent, or scary experiences, there is a lasting impact on our thoughts and feelings. Sometimes, these experiences create something called trauma.
- Trauma is not a mental illness, but it can have a similar impact. People can and do heal from trauma, but it takes extra support and time to find ways to cope with or process our feelings from the experience.
- Trauma can also be intergenerational, where our ancestors experience something and it continues to impact us. In Canada, our shared history of residential schools is an example of experiences that have created intergenerational trauma.
- There is also intergenerational strength, where we carry the gifts that our ancestors used to get through their hard times.

FYI: Trauma is often the underlying cause of many pressing problems in our communities, including, but not limited to, poverty, crime, violence, domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, low academic achievement, mental health problems, and addiction. Estimates show that within the general population, 1 in 4 Canadians has experienced a traumatic event, and 1 in 10 experiences post-traumatic stress.ⁱ An Indigenous way of understanding trauma is Blood/Bone Memory or Ancestral Memory. As described by Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, trauma, grief, or pain experienced by our ancestors, grandparents, and/or family members can pass down to us, as our blood and bones carry it.ⁱⁱ We must understand Blood/Bone Memory exists, because it can give meaning to our suffering. Suffering also comes from systems of oppression and experiencing discrimination, which is important to understand, too. There is a balance to our memory. We also receive the strengths, gifts, and wisdom that got our ancestors through traumatic experiences. This is a simplification of the teachings. There is a lot more to it.

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Your friend seems short-tempered all morning and distracted. As you sit down for lunch, they start to cry. How would you support them? What sort of feelings might be happening for them?

Your friend recently broke up with their partner. They seem upset by the situation and have started to spread rumours about their ex. How would you support them? What sort of feelings might be happening for them?

Your friend was recently in a car accident. Ever since then, they avoid driving anywhere and recently mentioned regularly having bad dreams about being in a car. How would you support them? What sort of feelings might be happening for them?

ⁱ Klinik Community Health. (2012). The Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre (MTIEC). In *Klinik*. <https://klinik.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Klinik-MTIEC-Brochure.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Waterfall, B. [Anishinaabekwe]. Lives in Bawaating [Sault St. Marie], Ontario. Oral teaching. 2019.