



# Let's Talk Summer Wellness

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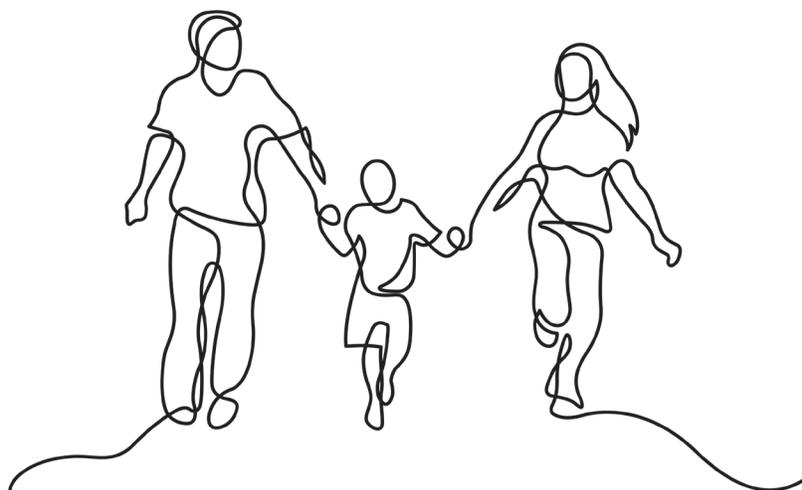
A mental health and wellness toolkit  
for families and youth



## Toolkit Overview

The Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) created *Let's Talk Summer Wellness* to help families and youth connect to wellness during the summer months. Inside you will find fun activities to stimulate conversations about mental health and develop healthy habits to promote wellness. In addition, the practical strategies below will help guide your family through this toolkit as you learn and grow together with a focus on mental health.

- ☀️ **Talk openly about mental health to reduce stigma** - Stigma often discourages people from talking about mental health challenges. When caregivers talk openly about mental health we create a safe and supportive space for our children to talk.
- ☀️ **Model healthy habits and routines** - Children learn by observing. When adults use positive coping strategies to manage life's stressors, youth are more inclined to develop and use their own strategies.
- ☀️ **Name your emotions** - Learning to recognize and identify our feelings is an important skill. Once developed, children can learn to manage uncomfortable emotions and ask for help, when needed.
- ☀️ **Spend time together and build supportive relationships** - Children need love, time and attention. Setting time aside to be with your child produces a stronger bond, making them feel valued and loved. Invite them to join you in an activity that you engage in to reduce stress.
- ☀️ **Be a good listener** - Affirm and validate each other's feelings and experiences. Listen non-judgmentally and create a safe space for children to express their concerns. We don't need to fix all their problems. Children develop resilience when they are supported through adversity.
- ☀️ **Participate in community or volunteer activities** - These types of activities support a sense of belonging and purpose, and help build respect for diverse perspectives, cultures and experiences.
- ☀️ **Celebrate successes - big and small** - Positive encouragement and appreciation of hard work can help motivate children to maintain healthy habits. Try asking: "What part of you are you most proud of?" to help create a positive inner dialogue and wellness mindset.



## Toolkit Activities

Mindfulness, breathing, grounding exercises and affirmations are helpful strategies to manage uncomfortable feelings and intrusive thoughts, and promote wellness. They are skills that require practice and patience. Incorporating them into creative activities is a fun way to build these skills together. See ideas below:

**Mindfulness** is the practice of focusing your attention on the present moment as a means of managing stress or as part of your self-care routine. Taking a break from a busy day to incorporate mindful practice can help keep you in the moment. It can be done at any time, including while driving, eating, walking, etc. Below are some examples of mindful activities:

- ☀️ Go for a walk and make a mental list of the sounds you hear.
- ☀️ Sit together and share a snack. Talk about what you are eating and describe it with all 5 senses: how does it taste, smell, feel, look and sound?
- ☀️ Lay in the grass and pay attention to how it feels on your body. Watch the clouds and find different shapes, animals or images. Write it down, focusing on as much detail as possible.

**Deep breathing** helps to reduce physical tension. When we are stressed, we tend to tense up and our breathing is limited. Practice deep breathing using one the strategies below:

- ☀️ Choose a positive phrase or mantra and repeat it as you inhale and exhale to keep your breathing steady and focused.
- ☀️ A common recommendation is 4-7-8 (inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8). If this is uncomfortable, modify the count to something that works for you.
- ☀️ Another recommendation is using a 1:2 ratio of inhale to exhale (i.e breathe in for 4 and exhale to a count of 8).

**Grounding** is a practice that helps us to be present and experience what we are doing, seeing, and hearing in the moment. It can be used to divert our attention from unpleasant thoughts, memories, and feelings, and support a sense of safety and calm. Practice grounding with the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 method:

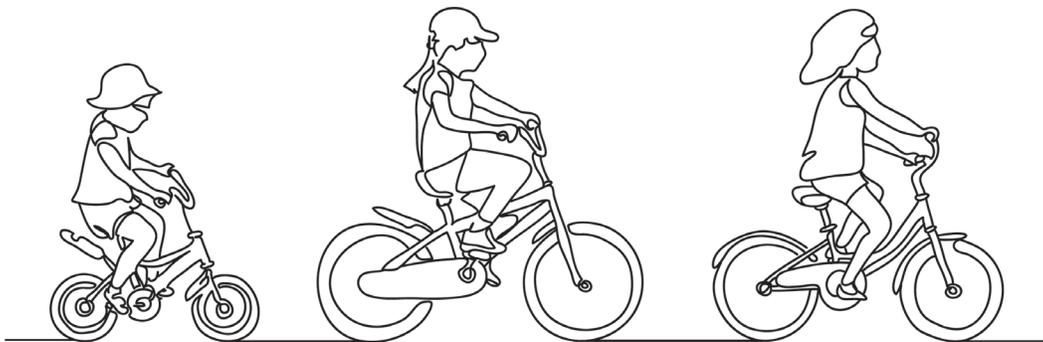
- ☀️ Look around at 5 things you see.
- ☀️ Smell 2 things that are nearby.
- ☀️ Pay attention to 4 things you can feel.
- ☀️ Name 1 thing you can taste.
- ☀️ Listen for 3 different sounds around you.

**Affirmations** (or mantras) help create a more positive inner dialogue and promote self confidence and self esteem. Some examples include:

- ☀️ I am enough (Who I am is enough).
- ☀️ I am proud to be me.
- ☀️ Even my worst day only lasts 24 hours.
- ☀️ I am grounded, confident and worthy.
- ☀️ I will stay positive, and work on a solution.
- ☀️ I am proud of myself for...



# Connect to wellness this summer!



WE ARE HERE TO HELP



MHANYS School Mental Health Resource and Training Center is available to provide information and resources to schools and families, including:

- mental health instruction and training
- guidance on community resources
- technical assistance

Contact us directly at [schools@mhany.org](mailto:schools@mhany.org)

or 1-800-766-6177 / 518-434-0439

[mentalhealthEDnys.org](http://mentalhealthEDnys.org)



MHANYS.org

