



# Classroom Mental Health: Wellness Strategies for Students (and Teachers!)

# Speakers



**Ross Szabo**

Wellness Director, Geffen  
Academy at UCLA



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Counselor Specialist  
Jefferson County  
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# Agenda

- 1 Overview: What do we mean by “Mental Wellness”?
- 2 Ross Szabo: Mental Wellness Foundations
- 3 Michelle Sircy: Educator Lessons in Mental Wellness
- 4 Practices for Educators
- 5 Resources for Students





# (Re)Defining Mental Health



Proactive - Focused on wellness

# What is Mental Health?

According to the World Health Organization, **mental health** is **defined** as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.





# Ross Szabo

Wellness Director

Geffen Academy at UCLA

# Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

## Reframe Mental Health

Mental health is not a problem. Think of mental health like physical health. You can improve and strengthen them both through your actions.

## Focus on Yourself

Taking care of your own mental health is an opportunity to model positive self-care for students and support your own well-being.

## Support Your Students

Establish a classroom environment that positively supports mental health and support your students individually when needed.

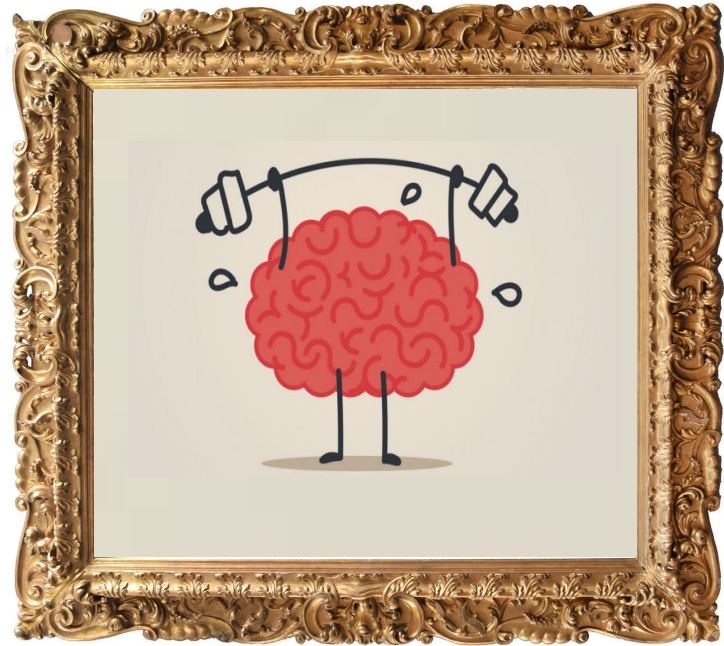
## Combat Stigma

Model positive mental health messaging and habits while actively speaking out against false or misleading understandings of mental health.

# Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

## Reframe Mental Health

1. Proactive, not reactive
2. It can always be improved
3. “Help” is not a dirty word



# Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

Reframe Mental Health

Focus on Yourself

Model good mental health practices, and...



...share your story

vulnerability  
with control

vs

vulnerability  
without control

# Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

Reframe Mental Health

Focus on Yourself

Support Your  
Students

- Create a positive learning environment
- Facilitate positive peer relations in class
- Embed mental breaks throughout the day
- Pay attention to the mental well-being of your students

# Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

Reframe Mental Health

Focus on Yourself

Support Your  
Students

## Mental Health Spectrum

Able to  
Balance

Difficult to  
Balance

Need Help  
to Balance

Needs  
Constant  
Assistance to  
Balance

Unable to  
Balance

# Bringing Mental Wellness into your Classroom

Reframe Mental Health

Focus on Yourself

Support Your  
Students

Combat Stigma

- Talk openly about mental health
- Be conscious of language
- Show compassion for those with mental illness
- Encourage equality between physical and mental illness
- Choose empowerment over shame
- Don't harbor self-stigma



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# Michelle Sircy

Counselor Specialist  
Jefferson County Public Schools

# Learning to be Comfortable with our Discomfort

What challenges do teachers face in feeling well-prepared to talk about mental wellness?

- The Pressure to Know Everything
- Preserving Your Own Mental Health
- Secondary Trauma

# Teachers: The First Line of Defense

First and foremost, relationships matter.

## Understanding Warning Signs

- Each child is different. A warning sign for one student may not be for another.
- Take note when thoughts, emotions, or behaviors:
  - Last longer than is typical for them
  - Are more intense than usual
  - Or stop them from completing daily tasks as they typically would

# Teaching Resilience + Coping Strategies

What are ways to help students cope and take mental health breaks?

- Learning to understand and manage stress
- Seeing warning signs in yourself and others
- Taking breaks from social media
- Teaching breathing techniques
- Offering naturally calming physical spaces

# Calming Physical Spaces

- Make the Space
  - Offer dedicated areas for mindfulness in your school or classroom
- Dim the Lights
  - Easy and surprisingly calming
- Set the Tone:
  - Offer visual reminders and cues



# Mental Breaks

## Classwide Mental Break Ideas

- Breathing Techniques
- Candy Senses Reflection Activity
  - What does it look like?
  - What is the texture like?
  - What does it feel like on your teeth?
- Regular Journaling



# The Power of Peers

How can educators empower students to advocate for themselves and others?

- Sources of Strength







# Talk Yourself Up

**Positive self-talk** makes you feel good about yourself and the things that are going on in your life. It's like having an optimistic voice in your head that always looks on the bright side.

*Examples:* 'I am doing the best I can', "If I don't make it through this grading tonight, it's not the end of the world"

**1. Listen to what you are saying to yourself**

- Notice what your inner voice is saying
- Is your self-talk mostly positive or negative?
- Each day, make notes on what you're thinking

**2. Challenge your self-talk**

- Is there any actual evidence for what I'm thinking?
- What would I say if a friend were in a similar situation?
- Can I do anything to change what I'm feeling bad about?

**3. Change your self-talk**

- Make a list of the positive things about yourself
- Instead of saying: 'I'll never be able to do this', try: 'Is there anything I can do that will help me do this?'

courtesy of Reachout.com

# Be Compassionate to Yourself

**Imagine a student schedule that looked like this:**

- No time to eat, drink or use the bathroom
- No opportunity to connect with friends
- Only focusing on work regardless of what is happening in personal life. (Just get work done- we don't have time to talk through what is going on!)
- No exercise
- No fun!

**Is this an optimal schedule for students?**

# Bolster Your Mental Health Foundations

## Healthy Habits

- Stretch and move once an hour
- Eat lunch!
- Healthy snacks on hand
- Breathe & relax
- Exercise

## Emotional Awareness

- Identify emotions
- Practice mindfulness
- Transition intentionally

## Positive Relationships

- Offer help
- Ask for help
- Stay positive in the teacher's lounge
- Maintain friendships outside of school

## Positive Mindset

- Growth Mindset
- Reframe your thoughts
- Keep things in perspective
- You've got this!



# Additional Resources



[samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov)

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- Federal resources and links to external resources



[nimh.nih.gov](https://www.nimh.nih.gov)

- National Institute of Mental Health
- Resources on data, diagnoses, and treatment.



[jedfoundation.org](https://www.jedfoundation.org)

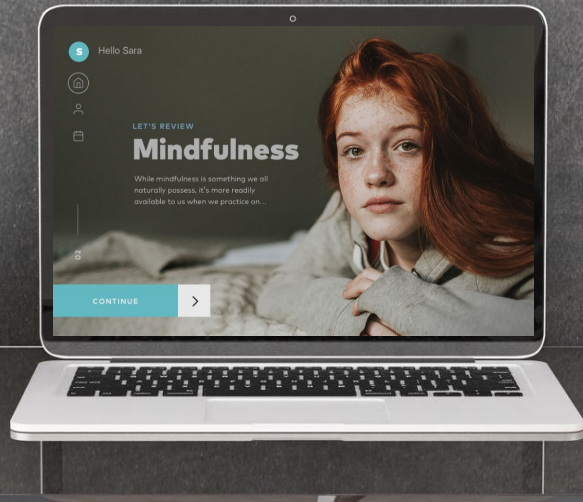
- Suicide prevention
- Find help and get involved

# Mental Wellness Basics

Grade Level: 8th-10th

Total Lessons: 4 lessons, approximately 40 minutes

Aligns with K-12 National Health Education Standards (NHES) as well as Common Core Literacy Standards (CCSS).



## At-a-Glance

We all must work on maintaining mental health especially during challenging times. This course provides learners with the knowledge and skills necessary to build, maintain and promote positive mental health. By helping all students develop a positive mindset, and normalizing the discussion of mental health concerns, this course reduces stigma and empowers students to help themselves and others.

## Course Highlights

- Four interactive modules with videos that promote learning through practice.
- Offline activities that allow teachers and students to extend learning as a class or individually.

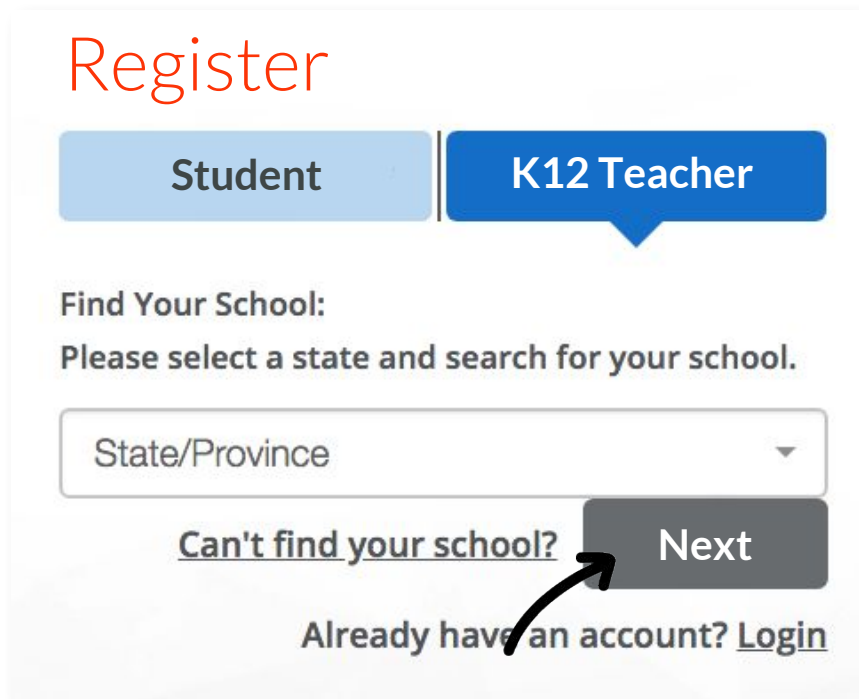
## Course Topics

- Components that lead to mental health
- Strategies that help you cope with challenges
- Seeking treatment for self and others
- Symptoms and causes of mental disorders

# Claim Your Account

[everfi.com/newteacher](https://everfi.com/newteacher)

- ▶ Find Your State
- ▶ Enter Your School



The screenshot shows the registration interface. At the top, the word "Register" is written in orange. Below it are two buttons: "Student" (light blue) and "K12 Teacher" (dark blue). The "K12 Teacher" button is highlighted with a white speech bubble. Underneath, the text "Find Your School: Please select a state and search for your school." is displayed. A dropdown menu labeled "State/Province" is shown with a downward arrow. Below the dropdown, there is a link that says "Can't find your school?" and a dark grey button labeled "Next". A black arrow points from the "Next" button to the "Can't find your school?" link. At the bottom, the text "Already have an account? [Login](#)" is visible.

# Implementation Support



## Your Local Schools Manager

- Support Specific to your District
- Deep Understanding of State Standards Alignment and Regional Usage
- Dedicated Training and Professional Development





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EDUCATION FOR THE REAL WORLD

# Mental Wellness Action Steps

## Combat Stigma

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## Focus on Yourself

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# Reframe Mental Health

Mental health is like your physical health.

- **It's not a problem.** You don't define your physical health only by diseases; your mental health is not only about mental illness.
- **You can improve it.** Just as you can take actions to improve your physical health, there are actions you can take to improve your mental health.
- **Getting help is no big deal.** If you are physically sick, going to the doctor is a no-brainer. Get treatment and get better. The same goes for your mental health.

Reframe Mental Health

# Focus on Yourself

Taking care of your own mental health first builds your resilience to handle the challenges in your life and career and gives you the wherewithal to help others.

Model Good Mental Health Practices

- Your students need to see it.
- You can talk about it too.



The same is true for your mental health.

Focus on Yourself

Reframe Mental Health

# Focus on Yourself - Share Your Story

Sharing the story of your own mental health journey can involve how you have dealt with stress, significant loss or even a mental disorder such as depression. The important thing is to model how to do this effectively.

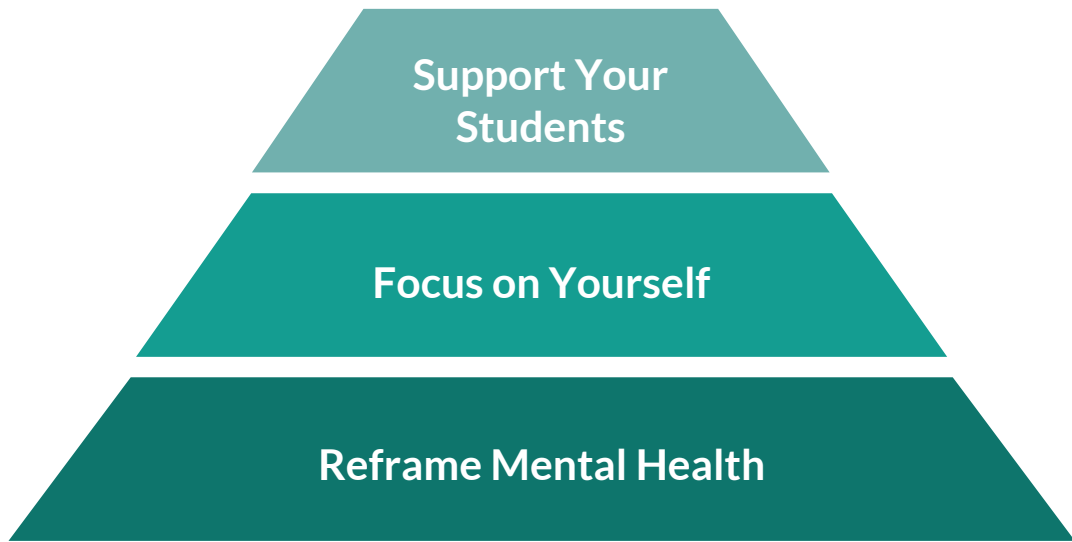
**Vulnerability  
without control.**

vs.

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# Support Your Students

Supporting the mental health of your students can come in many forms. But remember that you are not responsible for someone else's mental well-being.

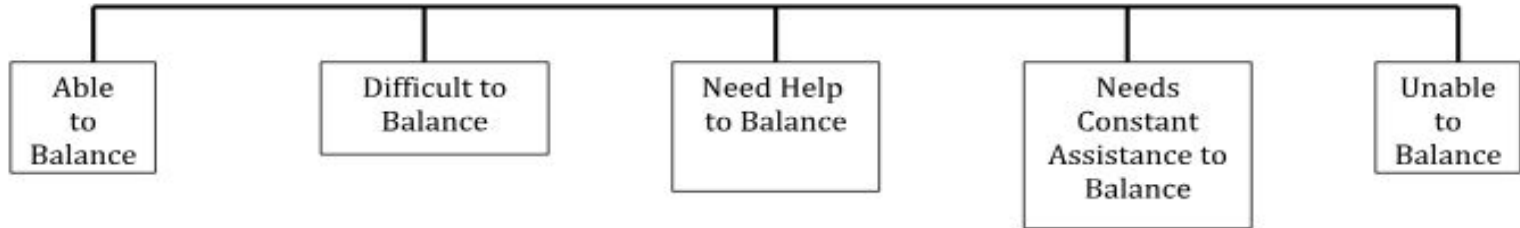


## In Practice:

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- Facilitate positive peer relations in class
- Embed mental breaks throughout the day
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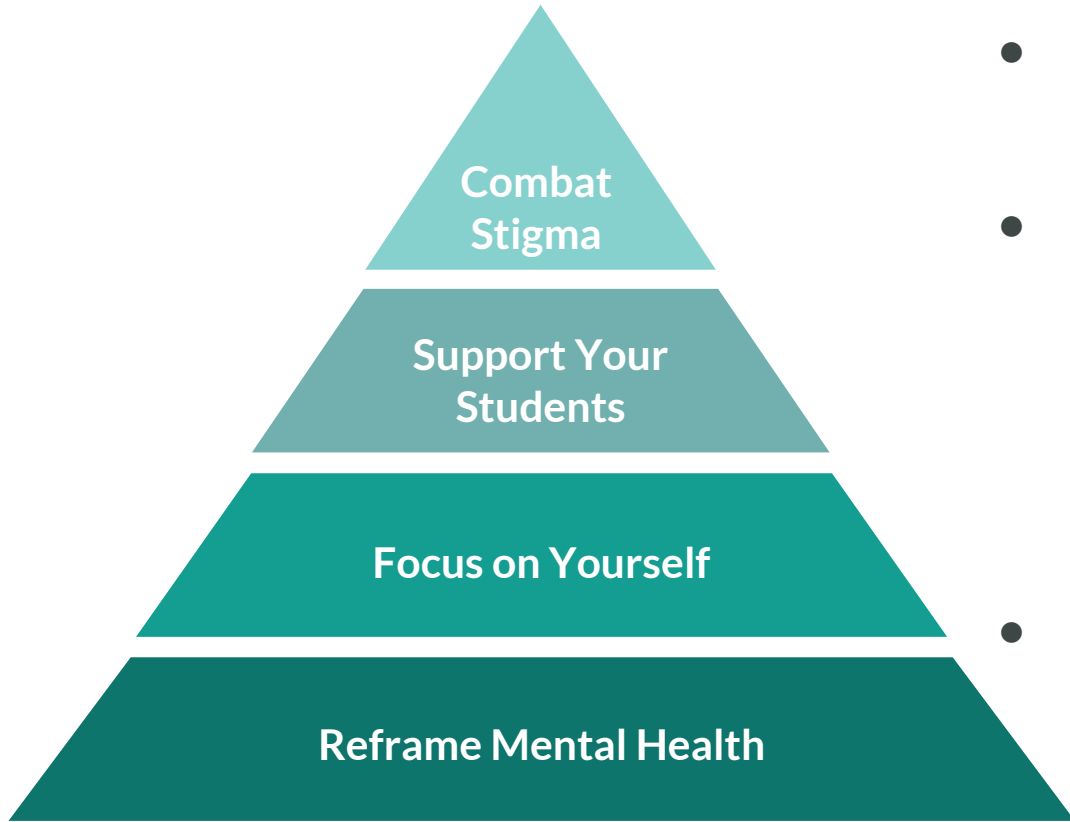
# Recognizing Balance

## Mental Health Spectrum





# Combat Stigma



Each of these Mental Wellness Action Steps contributes to fighting stigma.

- Combating mental health stigma starts with education and recognition that it is a part of all of our lives.
- Your students may have more experience or familiarity with mental health and mental disorders than you know. It is always good to start with understanding where they are before starting a conversation or unit of study.
- Your modeling of the approach and language you use can help fight stigma in and outside of your class.

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