



# Let's Talk Summer Wellness

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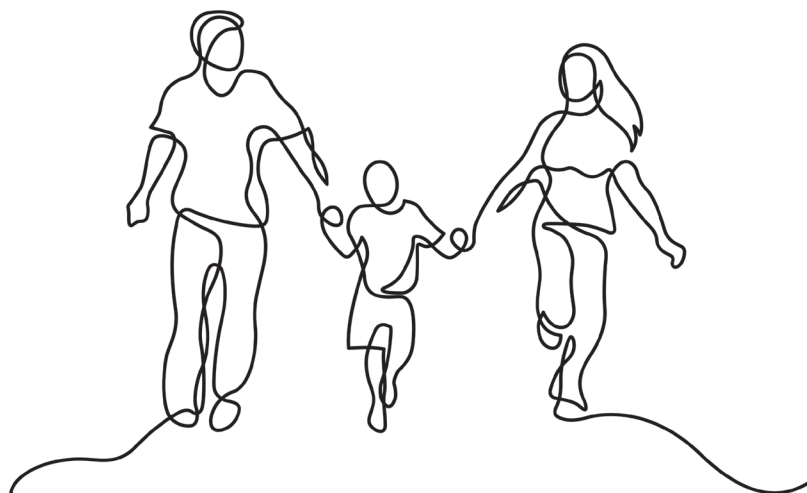
A mental health and wellness toolkit  
for families and youth



## 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





# Family Wellness Bingo

Create a <a href="#">calm/relaxing space</a> in your home	Go on a Mindful Nature Walk as a family	Start a Gratitude Jar and add 2 things each day you're grateful for	Create a family <a href="#">mood tracker</a> together	Create <a href="#">mindful stones</a> and place them around your neighborhood
Before bedtime, think about 3 good things that happened today	Try a new recipe together. If it's good, share it with your neighbors	Create a playlist of everyone's favorite uplifting songs and play it when needed	Take a mindful moment as a family and practice deep breathing	Have a family board game night
Pick an uplifting or funny film and have a family movie night	As a family, write kind letters to veterans and elders in your community	<b>Free Space</b>	Call/Video Call a friend or family member who you haven't seen in a while	Create a family <a href="#">wellness board</a>
Get to know each other! Play 21 questions with a family member	Write affirming notes and put them around the home for everyone to see	Take 10 minutes and encourage everyone to journal	Set a goal of 8 glasses of water for the day.	Search the Internet for new dance moves to try and learn. Have a dance party
Try out some yoga or stretch together	Create <a href="#">sensory/calm down jars</a>	Think of 5 people who have positively impacted your family and send them a thank you email or letter	Create <a href="#">soothing bracelets</a> for worried hands or busy minds	Take a reading break together for 20 minutes



## Four Weeks of Gratitude

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Say “thank you” to the most important person – you! Practice self-care.	Take a walk with someone you love.	Send an email to a friend you haven’t talked to in a long time.	Share a book you loved from your childhood with a little one you know.	Find something in nature that brings you peace. Keep it somewhere close to you.	Call the local fire or police department or send letter to editor thanking them for their service.	Learn something new, then teach a friend or family member.
Take a friend to a special place in your community that brings you happiness.	Send a “thank you” message to an educator or member of the school community.	Find an inspirational quote or story and share it with people you love.	Pick a book that you have enjoyed reading and share it with someone who will love it, too.	Start a Gratitude Jar...add 2 things each day you’re grateful for and watch jar fill up!	Clean out your pantry and donate non-expired canned goods.	Have a movie night with a feel-good film that makes you laugh.
Write a letter to a veteran or the elderly.	Bake your favorite sweet treat and share it with family for tonight’s desert!	Clean out your closet and collect some things to donate.	Rake the leaves for a neighbor or a community member.	Have a game night! Pick your favorite boardgame to share with your family.	Play 21 questions with someone to get to know them better.	Find a positive social media message and tag 10 friends to spread the positivity.
Find your favorite uplifting songs and create a playlist to share with friends or family.	Create a gratitude rock. Check out our simple DIY video on this activity. <a href="#">Linked here!</a>	Pull out old year books and share your favorite photos with your classmates.	Think of 5 people who have had a positive impact on you and send them a thank you email.	Write a letter to someone who helped you accomplish a goal.	Write a letter to your future self about the importance of gratitude.	Go on a walk and think about things you love about yourself and your community.

To learn more, visit the School Mental Health Resource and Training Center at [www.mentalhealthEDnys.org](http://www.mentalhealthEDnys.org) or call **518.434.0439**



# Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

## Kindness Cards

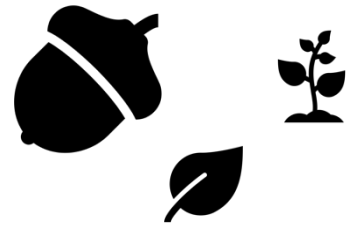
Cut out the cards, decorate them (*or not*), and place them in spots others may see them.

I hope this brightens your day! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	You're doing a great job! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	You are making an impact on the world! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	Thank you for being you! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>
You are enough! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	You are appreciated! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	I believe in you! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	Thank you for being you! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>
I hope this brightens your day! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	You're doing a great job! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	You are making an impact on the world! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	Thank you for being you! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>
You are enough! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	You are appreciated! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	I believe in you! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>	Thank you for being you! <i>Thinking of you today.</i>

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### HEALTHY MINDS FOR A HEALTHY NEW YORK

194 Washington Avenue, Suite 415 • Albany, New York 12210-2314  
Phone: 518-434-0439 • Fax: 518-427-8676 • MHANYS.org



## Mindful Nature Hunt

Every once in a while, it's good to take a moment to step back, appreciate and reflect on the little things around us. Using the calming elements of nature and simplistic conversation of everyday items, can help us feel more grounded. This simple mindful scavenger hunt creates a safe space both physically and mentally; providing comfort and an opportunity to open the conversation about what may be impacting our mental wellness.



Look for these everyday objects you can find in your backyard, or at a local park and take a mindful moment to talk about some questions for each one

### Find the following objects:

- Plant
- Tree
- Living Critter
- Something that doesn't belong in nature
- Pinecone
- Rock
- Flower
- Leaf
- Stick
- A pair of...



- What color is it?
- What does it feel like?
- How big is it?
- How heavy is it?
- What does it smell like?

### Reflect on what you found using the questions below:

- What was the brightest color you found? What color do you feel like when you are angry? Sad? Happy? What color are you feeling now?
- What did you find that didn't belong in nature? Do you ever feel like you don't belong?
- Did you find anything that came in a pair? Who is someone you can talk to (your pair)?
- What is the heaviest object you found? Do you have any concerns that feel like a heavy weight? How does your body feel when you carry those "weights"?
- What is the roughest item you found? What coping tools help you when things get rough?
- Did any item you found have a smell? What is a scent that helps you feel calm?
- What is the biggest item you found? What is something that makes you feel proud? What makes you feel big and powerful?



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## Develop Self-Awareness with a Mood Tracking Tool

Building capacity for self-awareness is an important part of social-emotional learning. Being mindful of our emotions is a powerful skill - allowing us to track how we respond to stressors and the world around us. Mood tracking is a simple way to help individuals connect and reflect on their emotions throughout different times of the day. It can also serve as a reminder to use self-management techniques to control the harmful impact stress can have on our overall well-being.

Daily mood tracking helps us be accountable for our emotions or behaviors. For example, if you find that you are irritable and rushed in the morning, maybe taking time to practice a few minutes of self-care, such as physical activity or mindfulness, will help you relax before starting your day. This attention to daily tracking may also help you identify necessary changes to your routine. Maybe your morning irritability is because you are going to sleep later and later, and waking up at the last minute. Problem-solving and managing stress through self-discipline are also important social-emotional learning skills.

If you or someone close to you is struggling to manage a positive mood or a healthy mindset, this tool can be especially helpful to start the “I noticed” conversation. Mood tracking provides the opportunity to identify patterns. Are there certain times of the day that may seem more stressful? Are there situations or relationships that need special attention? As problem areas are identified, a mood tracking tool can help the user create a routine to manage the day - putting individuals in the driver seat of their emotions and stress responses. Pairing activities, coping skills, or encouraging thoughts with anticipated stressors can help stimulate positive thinking, establish a sense of gratitude and enhance mindfulness.

The example below could be used as a basic format for tracking mood. Modify it for younger children or use it as a tool for the whole family.

## Creating a Calm Space

Do you often feel overstimulated and overwhelmed? Do you find comfort in quiet spaces and calm environments? Creating a comfortable space and minimizing clutter can have a positive effect on our mood, thoughts and behaviors at home, in the classroom or at the office.



Create a calm space that is as unique as you!

1. Sounds – different sounds can promote different moods.
  - nature sounds or instrumental music are soothing background sounds
  - pop or dance music can promote energy and movement
2. Colors – choose a color palette that works for you.
  - cool colors can be both soothing and energizing (blues / greens)
  - colors found in nature can be very grounding and peaceful (brown/green)
3. Smells – consider what smells good to you
  - use candles, aromatherapy or cooking to fill your space with smells
4. Textures – positive memories can be brought back with how things make us feel
  - wrap yourself in a comfortable blanket, shirt or wear your favorite socks
  - fill a bowl with pinecones or smooth stones from outside
5. Objects – have items in your space that lift your mood
  - photos of family, friends, culture, favorite places
  - plants or other living things
  - inspirational or motivational quotes

Finally, declutter your space– too much “stuff” can feel overwhelming

- Pack away what you don’t need; you can always bring it back out later
- Delete or unsubscribe from email lists to reduce the number of messages you receive
- Organize your space; the internet is full of tips and articles to help
- Recycle, donate or throw out things you don’t need
  - o *Bonus: donating to others can be a great way to support the local community*

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## Creating a Wellness Board

You may be familiar with a Vision Board - a collection of images, quotes and found objects that bring inspiration and motivation to accomplishing your goals or planning for an event. A Wellness Board is a similar concept but the purpose is to promote hope and positive thinking, and serve as a reminder of our strengths, resilience and self-care tools. Creating one as a family can ignite meaningful discussion about mental health and wellness, and help us identify strategies for building healthy habits. ALTERNATIVE: decorate a box for holding wellness tools, such as stress balls, bubbles, journal and mindful stones.



### Materials List:

- Board or box - can be made of poster board, cardboard, scrap wood, sheet metal, etc.
- Scissors or other cutting tools
- Markers, pens, pencils, paint
- Glue, tape, or other type of adhesive
- Consider: encouraging mantras or positive affirmations, your favorite song lyrics or poetry, photos (family, friends, pets, favorite places or things to do), images from magazines of calming spaces or your favorite self-care strategies, scraps of paper or literature, motivational quotes, meaningful symbols and your own creations, such as paintings or drawings.

### How to use your creation when you need to manage stress:

- Focus on meaningful images or repeat quotes and affirmations while you practice mindful breathing.
- Count the images to ground yourself in the present moment.
- If you decorated a box - fill it with tools for practicing self-care so they are readily available when needed.

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## Soothing Bracelet for Busy Hands or Worried Minds

A soothing bracelet is a simple, DIY craft that can help us be mindful when struggling with intrusive thoughts or negative ideas by turning our attention toward an object or repetitive motion. Paired with deep breathing or a positive statement, such as “I am in control”, “I am safe” or “I am calm” can help us manage uncomfortable emotions and limit the control stress has over us. Sometimes a physical reminder like the soothing bead, can be exactly what we need to bring us back to the present moment, more prepared to problem solve, and enjoy the day.

### Materials List:

- Many small beads & 1 larger bead that feels nice to you (could be smooth or textured)
- Elastic to “string” the beads
- Scissors
- Optional – bowls or empty egg carton to organize beads

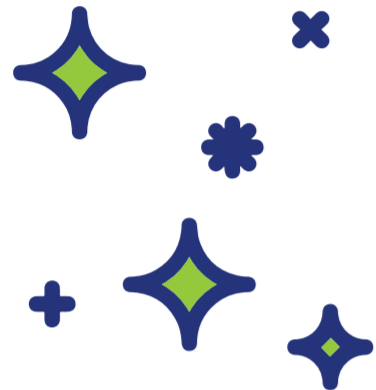


### Instructions:

1. Measure wrist with elastic. Leave extra room in order to tie it together, then cut. (You can always trim later, better than being too short!)
2. Tie a strong knot on one end of the elastic.
3. Add beads until the elastic is almost full and tie a tight knot, leaving enough room to easily remove the bracelet.
4. Next, measure a piece of elastic from your wrist to the tip of your middle finger, leaving extra room to tie knots at both ends.
5. Tie one end to the bracelet and begin adding beads. Once you have added enough beads to reach the tip of your middle finger, add the last larger bead and tie off the elastic tightly.
6. You should now be able to slide the bracelet onto your wrist and hold the larger bead in your hand, rubbing it to self-soothe when needed.
7. Wrap the long piece around your wrist and tuck it into elastic when not in use.
8. Worried or Stressed? Just unravel, and rub the soothing bead, recite positive statements, or transfer your worry into the bead, leaving you free to carry on with your day worry free.

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# STRESS LESS TECHNIQUES



**Express Yourself**



**Spend Time Alone**



Color, Paint or Draw  
 Write in a Journal  
 Build Something Awesome  
 Make Music or Dance

Read a Book  
 Practice Deep Breathing  
 Declutter Personal Space  
 Unplug and Rest Your Eyes

**Get Out in Nature**

**Practice Healthy Habits**

**Connect with Others**



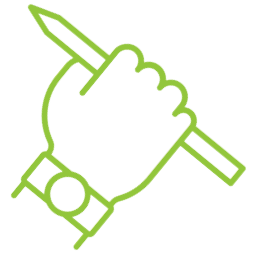
Star Gaze  
 Play Outside  
 Go for a Walk  
 Sit in the Sun

Get Regular Sleep  
 Eat Nutritious Foods  
 Move Your Body  
 Stick to a Routine

Talk to Friends  
 Practice Gratitude  
 Video Chat with Family  
 Act with Kindness



# Mood Tracker



Time of Day	How are you feeling?	What does it feel like?	What happened?	What skill will help?
Morning				
Afternoon				
Evening				

