

**THIS BOOKLET BELONGS TO:**



**EMBRACING LIFE INITIATIVE**

# **YOUTH VOICE TOOLKIT**

**MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION WORKBOOK  
CREATED WITH YOUTH FOR YOUTH**



# **THIS TOOLKIT WAS CREATED WITH YOUTH, FOR YOUTH, BY EMBRACING LIFE.**

**THE EMBRACING LIFE INITIATIVE ASKED OVER 50 YOUTH WHAT THEY THOUGHT WAS NEEDED TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH, LIFE PROMOTION, AND SUICIDE PREVENTION IN NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN. THERE WAS AN OVERWHELMING RESPONSE THAT THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH RESOURCES FOR YOUTH TO LEARN, SHARE, AND PRACTICE HOW TO SUPPORT IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES.**

**SO, EMBRACING LIFE CREATED A FULLY YOUTH-MADE TOOLKIT, BASED ON THE FEEDBACK FROM THE YOUTH VOICE PROJECT, INCLUDING SURVEYS, SHARING CIRCLES, AND INTERVIEWS. EMBRACING LIFE BELIEVES IN THE IMPORTANCE OF THE YOUTH VOICE -- IN AMPLIFYING IT AND INCLUDING IT IN ALL FACETS OF THE INITIATIVE -- FOR YOUTH TO SHARE THEIR VISIONS, THOUGHTS, AND SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS THEY SEE IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES.**

**LET'S LEARN AND USE THESE TOOLS TO BUILD OUR CONFIDENCE AND CAPACITY IN SUPPORTING ONE ANOTHER EVERY DAY.**

**EMBRACING LIFE INITIATIVE**

**EMBRACINGLIFESK.COM**

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# **INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS EMBRACING LIFE?**

**THE EMBRACING LIFE INITIATIVE IS A CALL FOR ACTION TO REDUCE SUICIDE BY SHARING THE STRENGTHS OF NORTHERN COMMUNITIES AND WORKING TOGETHER THROUGH HEALTHY LIFE PROMOTION, SUICIDE PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, AND POST-VENTION.**



**EMBRACING LIFE WORKS FROM THE GROUND UP, WITH AND IN COMMUNITY, TO INCREASE CAPACITY, SUPPORT IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS, AND BUILD REQUESTED RESOURCES FROM A PEOPLE PERSPECTIVE. EMBRACING LIFE BELIEVES IN THE PREVENTATIVE POWER OF NATURAL SUPPORTS - THOSE WHO YOU SUPPORT AND THOSE WHO SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR LIFE.**



**THE EMBRACING LIFE INITIATIVE IS A CONSORTIUM OF AGENCIES, COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS, GOVERNMENT, AND YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES THAT WORK TOGETHER TO FURTHER CONVERSATIONS AND ACTIONS AROUND LIFE PROMOTION AND SUICIDE PREVENTION.**

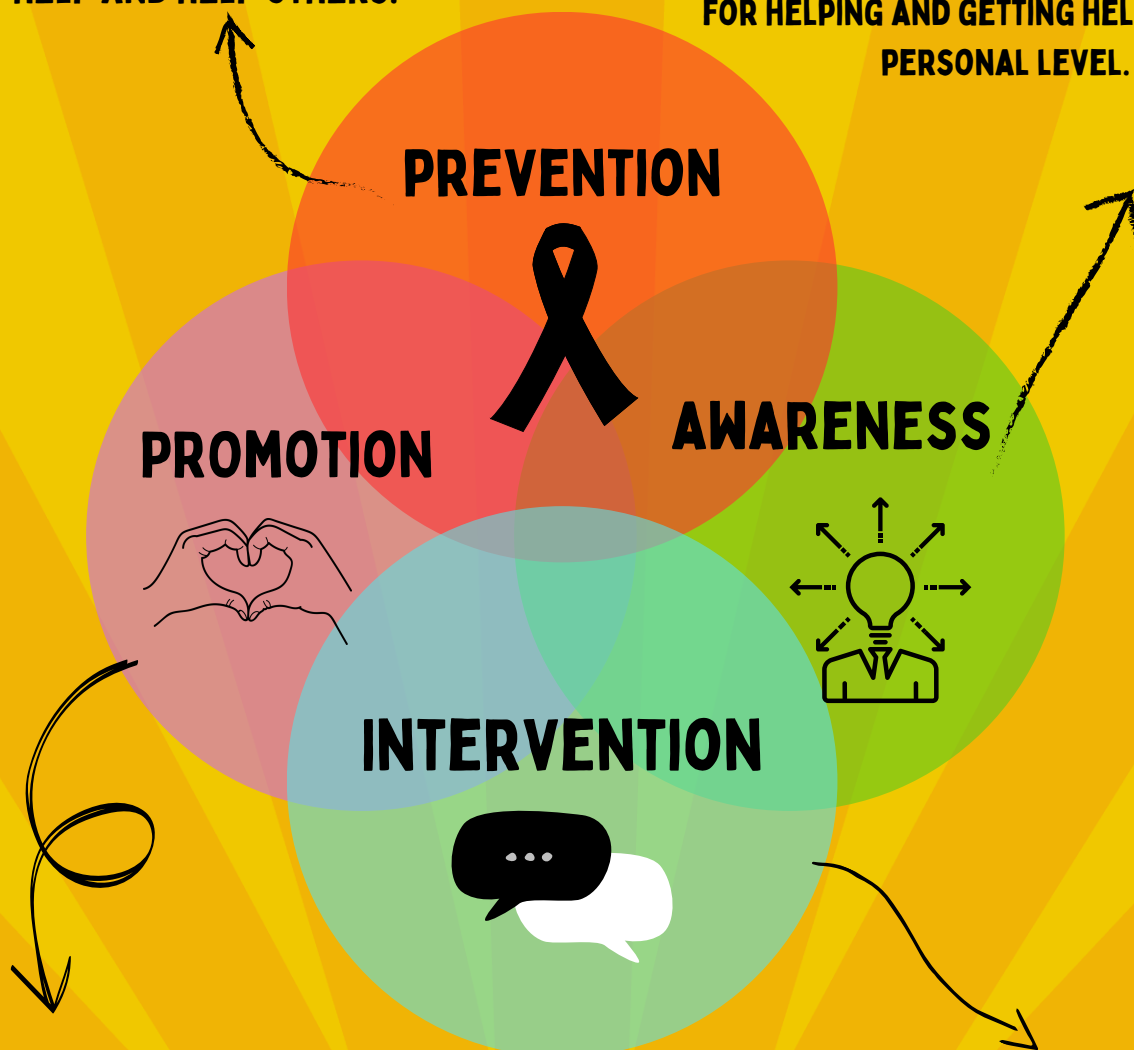




# **GOALS:**

**SUICIDE IS A REAL ISSUE THAT TENDS TO GET SWEEPED UNDER THE CARPET. ONE OF OUR GOALS IS TO PROVIDE PEOPLE WITH THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO GET HELP AND HELP OTHERS.**

**SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT IF YOU TALK ABOUT SUICIDE, IT WILL ENCOURAGE SUICIDE BEHAVIORS. THIS ISN'T TRUE. TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE AND REMOVING THE STIGMA COULD SAVE A LIFE! THERE ARE MANY MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC, BUT NOT EVERYONE IS AWARE OF THEM. THIS TOOLKIT CONTAINS INFORMATION ON HELPFUL RESOURCES, AS WELL AS STRATEGIES FOR HELPING AND GETTING HELP ON A MORE PERSONAL LEVEL.**



**PROMOTION AND AWARENESS HELP INCREASE PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WHERE TO GO FOR HELP, WHICH IS CRUCIAL FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION.**

**ONE OF THE PURPOSES OF THIS TOOLKIT IS TO PROVIDE THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE TO EQUIP PEOPLE -- ESPECIALLY YOUTH -- TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE. THESE CONVERSATIONS CAN ACTUALLY BE THE STARTING POINT OF AN INTERVENTION.**

# **CHAPTER 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH VOICE**

**GIVING YOUTH A VOICE IS ESSENTIAL FOR FOSTERING A MORE INCLUSIVE, DYNAMIC, AND FORWARD-THINKING COMMUNITY. CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH PROMOTES A SENSE OF BELONGING, EMPOWERS THE YOUNGER GENERATION, BUILDS CONFIDENCE, AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE OVERALL HEALTH AND VIBRANCY OF COMMUNITIES.**

## **HOW TO FIND YOUR VOICE:**

- **CONFIDENCE**
  - **CONFIDENCE CAN HELP YOU TO FEEL SECURE IN YOUR BELIEFS.**
- **SUPPORT**
  - **HAVING SOMEONE TO LISTEN TO YOUR VOICE IS HELPFUL**



**WHEN YOU USE YOUR VOICE, YOU CAN ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO FIND THEIR VOICE AS WELL.**



# **OUR YOUTH VOICE**

**WE ASKED YOUTH ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND PEER SUPPORT SYSTEMS IN THE NORTH. HERE IS SOME OF THE FEEDBACK WE RECEIVED:**

**"SOME ADULTS DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT A TEENAGER GOES THROUGH IN THIS GENERATION SO I FEEL LIKE HAVING PEER SUPPORT IN THE NORTH IS VERY IMPORTANT."**

**"I BELIEVE THAT MANY INDIVIDUALS OFTEN AREN'T EXPOSED TO POSITIVE TACTICS AND RATHER EXPOSED TO NEGATIVE/UNHEALTHY COPING MECHANISMS. PROVIDING INDIVIDUALS WITH POSITIVE COPING SKILLS WOULD BE BENEFICIAL IN THE SHORT AND LONG TERM ASPECTS."**

**"I THINK SERVICES ARE ON THE RIGHT PATH TO GETTING BETTER BUT IT CAN ALWAYS IMPROVE. A LOT OF KIDS AREN'T TOLD ABOUT THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE AND MENTAL HEALTH ISN'T TALKED ABOUT ENOUGH IN NORTHERN COMMUNITIES."**

**"I THINK IT WOULD BE GREAT TO HAVE OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES AND HELP WOULD BE REALLY BENEFICIAL. WE CAN LEARN FROM EACH OTHER'S EXPERIENCES AND KNOW THAT WE CAN SURVIVE SIMILAR EXPERIENCES."**

## **"I JUST WISH WE HAD MORE THAN THIS"**

**"MENTAL HEALTH IS SO MUCH MORE OVERLOOKED IN THE NORTH"**

**"I THINK IF WE HAD ENOUGH RESOURCES (MENTAL HEALTH) THERE WOULD BE LESS PEOPLE DRINKING SO MUCH."**

**"PLEASE ACTUALLY DO SOMETHING. I'VE FILLED OUT TONS OF THESE SURVEYS AND HAVE NEVER FOUND IT ANY EASIER TO FIND HELP."**

# **CHAPTER 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH VOICE**

## **STORY**

The town was debating whether to close the community centre, because it had become too expensive for daily operation. Alex had been playing basketball there since he was small, and the centre had been a safe and fun place for him and his friends to go after school. He knew that it was an amazing asset to the community, especially for younger people like him. After months of debate at council meetings, rumours began to float around town that the local leaders were expected to vote for closure of the community centre. Worried but motivated, Alex convinced some of his friends to join him in attending the town hall to present on why the centre should remain open.

The immediate reaction of many council members was to dismiss the kids' argument. They said things like "You're too young to understand this problem" and "we already tried that, and it didn't work." A couple council members seemed interested in what Alex and his friends had to say, and thanked them for participating in the discussion, but agreed that it no longer made financial sense to keep the centre open. Frustrated but determined, Alex asked the council to at least not make a final decision until the next meeting so that he and his friends could gather more feedback and support. The council agreed.

Alex and his friends regrouped, and a few days later, asked their Social Studies teacher to help them organize a presentation at their school. The response from the other students and many of the teachers was overwhelmingly positive. From there, they were able to convince their principal to assist them in arranging a town gathering at the community centre itself, where Alex and his friends could present their arguments and ideas to kids and adults alike. Council members received the first invitations.

With strength in numbers, Alex, his friends, their teachers and schoolmates, and many other adults were able to convince the council that the community centre was too valuable to close, and that it should at least remain open on a limited schedule while community members organized various drives and fundraisers specifically devoted to keeping the centre open on a regular basis. The council members agreed, and when they took it up at their next meeting, voted unanimously to keep the community center open and operational. Encouraged by the success of his and his friends' determination, Alex realized that his voice did have meaning and influence, and that it was important to make sure their voices were heard, because it could have actual positive impacts in the community.

# YOUTH VOICE

HOW WILL I USE MY VOICE  
TO HELP OTHERS?



WHAT IS THE IMPACT  
OF OUR VOICE?

HOW CAN I HELP SOMEONE  
ELSE FIND THEIR VOICE?





# **CHAPTER 2: THE SEVEN GRANDFATHER**



## **TEACHINGS**



**WISDOM. LOVE. RESPECT. BRAVERY.  
HONESTY. HUMILITY. TRUTH.**

**THE SEVEN GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS ARE VALUES THAT SHAPE OUR LIVES AND  
MAKE US STRONG AND RESILIENT. PRACTICING THESE TEACHINGS EVERY DAY  
CAN MAKE US BETTER LISTENERS AND BETTER FRIENDS.**

### **WISDOM... THE BEAVER**



Wisdom is represented by the beaver because he uses his natural gift wisely for his survival. The beaver also alters his environment in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way for the benefit of his family. To cherish knowledge is to know wisdom. To have wisdom is to know the difference between positive and negative and know the result of your action.



### **LOVE... THE EAGLE**



Love is represented by the eagle because he has the strength to carry all the teachings. The eagle has the ability to fly highest and closest to the creator and also has the sight to see all the ways of being from great distances. The Eagle's teaching of love can be found in the core of all teachings, therefore an eagle feather is considered the highest honour and a sacred gift. Eagles are loving parents and teachers to their offspring, protecting and guiding them. To know love is to know peace. Love must be unconditional.

# **THE SEVEN GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS**

## **RESPECT... THE BUFFALO**



The buffalo is highly respected by First Nations peoples because it gives its life to, and shares every part of its being with, the people. It provides the gifts of shelter, clothing, and utensils. Indigenous peoples developed a reciprocal and sustainable relationship with the buffalo rooted in utmost respect.



## **COURAGE/BRAVERY... THE BEAR**

Bravery is represented by the bear. The mother bear has the courage and strength to face her fears and challenges while protecting her young. The bear also shows us how to live a balanced life with rest, survival, and play. To face life with courage is to know bravery.



## **HONESTY... THE SABE**

Honesty is represented by the Sabe. The Sabe understands who they are and how to walk in their life. Sabe reminds us to be ourselves and not someone we are not. An honest person is said to walk tall like Kitchi-Sabe. To walk through life with integrity is to know honesty. Be honest with yourself. Recognize and accept who you are. Accept and use the gifts you have been given. Do not seek to deceive yourself or others.



## **HUMILITY... THE WOLF**

Humility is represented by the wolf. For the wolf, life is lived for his pack and the ultimate shame is to be outcast. To accept yourself as a sacred part of creation is to know humility. Live life selflessly and not selfishly. Respect your place and carry your pride with your people and praise the accomplishments of all. Do not become arrogant and self-important. Find balance within yourself and all living things.



## **TRUTH... THE TURTLE**

Truth is represented by the turtle as he was here during creation of Earth and carries the teachings of life on his back. The turtle lives life in a slow and meticulous manner, because he understands the importance of both the journey and the destination. Truth is to know of these things.



# **CHAPTER 2: THE SEVEN GRANDFATHER**

## **TEACHINGS STORY**

When Betty received an invitation from her friend Rita to join her family gathering, she wasn't sure what to expect. Rita had always shared stories of her Indigenous heritage, but Betty had never experienced Indigenous traditions firsthand.

The gathering took place in Rita's backyard, where the smell of sage filled the air. After a delicious meal of fried fish and stew, during which Betty got to know Rita's family, the group moved to the fire and sat around it. There was quiet for a moment, and then Rita's grandfather, John, began to speak.

"I want to share a story with you all," he began. "When I was a boy, my grandfather taught me the Seven Grandfather Teachings. These teachings are gifts we carry with us through life, to help guide our hearts and minds."

Betty listened closely, captivated by the elder's words. He spoke of the seven teachings—wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth. Each one was a lesson that had shaped his life.

"These teachings are like the foundation of who we are," John continued. "They are not just lessons to be learned, but truths to be lived."

When John finished speaking, Betty felt a deep sense of connection to the teachings, even though she had only heard them for the first time.

Rita looked at her. "Which one do you think speaks to you the most, Betty?"

Betty thought for a moment. "I think... respect. It feels like everything starts with respect—respect for myself, for others, and for the world around me."

The elder smiled. "Respect is a beautiful choice. It is the foundation that holds everything together."

"I'd like to learn more," Betty said. "Maybe we can meet again and talk more about them?"

John nodded with approval. "I would be happy to share with you anytime, Betty. Whenever you want to get together, just let Rita know and we can talk about anything you wish."

As the fire flickered and the circle continued, Betty felt a new sense of purpose and connection. She knew this was only the beginning of her journey with the Seven Grandfather Teachings.

# THE SEVEN GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS

## HOW CAN I TAKE ACTION USING THE SEVEN GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS?

### LOVE

HOW CAN I KEEP AN OPEN HEART?



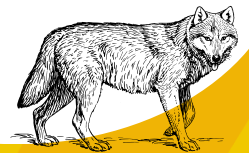
### RESPECT

HOW CAN I RESPECT ALL LIVING THINGS?



### HUMILITY

HOW CAN I RECOGNIZE STRENGTHS?



### BRAVERY

WHAT HELPS ME TRY NEW THINGS?



### HONESTY

HOW WILL I BE HONEST WITH MYSELF  
AND OTHERS?

### TRUTH

HOW WILL I SPEAK FROM A PLACE OF  
TRUTH?

### WISDOM

HOW DO I LEARN AND GROW FROM EXPERIENCES?



# **CHAPTER 3: HOPE AND BELONGING**

**BE KIND.ACCEPT.EMPOWER.SMILE.EMBRACE.**

## **HOPE:**

**HOPE MEANS TO HAVE SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO—TO EXPECT A FUTURE. HOPE IS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR AGAINST SUICIDE BECAUSE IT DRIVES OPTIMISM ABOUT TOMORROW.**

## **BELONGING:**

**BELONGING IS A FEELING OF ACCEPTANCE. HAVING A SENSE OF BELONGING CAN SHAPE OUR OUTLOOK AND PERSPECTIVE ON LIVING. BELONGING CREATES HOPE.**

## **IMPACT:**

**THE PRESENCE OF BOTH HOPE AND BELONGING CAN SHAPE OUR ABILITY TO BE RESILIENT AND OVERCOME DIFFICULT THINGS IN OUR LIVES. HOPE AND BELONGING ARE KEY ELEMENTS TO SUCCESS—EMOTIONALLY, PHYSICALLY, SPIRITUALLY, AND MENTALLY.**

**HOPE AND BELONGING MATTER.**



# CHAPTER 3: HOPE AND BELONGING STORY

The days had blurred into one long stretch of gray for Oliver. Each morning, he woke up, stared at the ceiling, and wondered if it was worth getting out of bed. Everything felt heavy, like a weight pressing down on his chest. His friends had drifted away over the years, and the few family members he still talked to seemed to disappear whenever he needed them most.

One afternoon, as he walked down the street, Oliver noticed a sign hanging outside a small building: “Community Potluck – Everyone Welcome!” He could hear laughter and conversation spilling out from inside. The thought of walking in, of being surrounded by people he didn’t know, made him want to turn around and go home, but he decided that this would be a test for himself.

The moment he stepped in, a woman across the room smiled at him. She didn’t ask any questions; she just waved him over.

“Hey there! Glad you could make it. I’m Brittany. Come join us, there’s plenty of food.”

Oliver hesitated, feeling out of place, but Brittany’s smile was so genuine that he couldn’t resist. He sat down at a table with a few others, who greeted him with nods and smiles, offering him a plate.

The conversation flowed around him, but nobody expected Oliver to share anything. No one asked why he looked so tired, or why they had ever seen him around before. They simply included him in the rhythm of the evening, as if his presence was just as important as everyone else’s.

As he became more comfortable, Oliver found himself laughing and opening up, talking about his love for books. One of the guests mentioned a nearby library that was holding a book club. “You should come next week,” the man said. “We’d love to have you.”

By the time the potluck was winding down, Oliver was no longer the stranger in the room. He was just another person—a quiet one, maybe, but one who belonged. As he stepped back into the cool night air, something inside him shifted. The weight on his chest didn’t disappear, but it wasn’t quite as suffocating. Maybe he had found a place to start—with people who simply wanted to share their space with him. It wasn’t much, but it was enough to make him feel like he mattered.

And for the first time in a long while, Oliver realized he wasn’t as alone as he’d thought. In that small, welcoming room, he had found something worth holding on to—a community that had given him the one thing he had lost: a sense of belonging.

# HOPE AND BELONGING

**WHAT ARE THINGS THAT MAKE ME  
HOPEFUL FOR THE FUTURE?**



**WHERE DO I FEEL LIKE I BELONG?**



**HOW CAN I HELP TO MAKE SOMEONE IN MY  
LIFE FEEL HOPE AND BELONGING?**

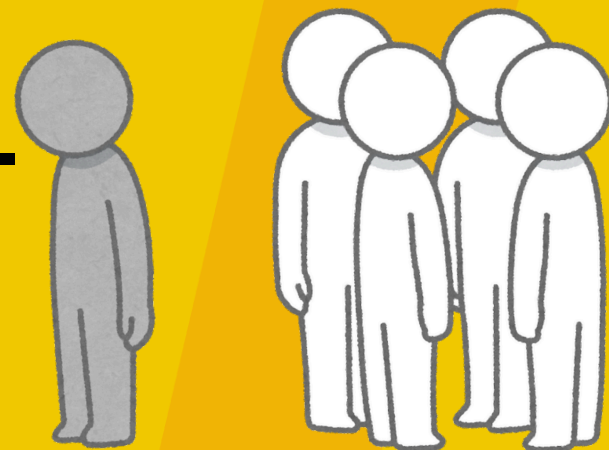
HOPE	BELONGING





# **CHAPTER 4: STIGMA**

**STIGMAS ARE NEGATIVE BELIEFS OR ATTITUDES SURROUNDING IMPORTANT SUBJECTS—LIKE SUICIDE OR MENTAL HEALTH.**



## **HARMFUL EFFECTS OF STIGMA:**

- **FEELINGS OF SHAME, HOPELESSNESS, AND ISOLATION**
- **RELUCTANCE TO ASK FOR HELP OR SUPPORT**
- **LACK OF UNDERSTANDING BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS**
- **BULLYING OR HARASSMENT**
- **SELF-DOUBT**



## **ADDRESSING STIGMA:**

- **LEARN THE FACTS AND SHARE THEM**
- **TREAT ALL PEOPLE WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY**
- **USE PROPER TERMINOLOGY AND POSITIVE LANGUAGE**
- **SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE TO NORMALIZE IT**
- **GET MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**
- **CONNECT WITH OTHERS**



# **CHAPTER 4: STIGMA STORY**

Since the beginning of the school year, Maya had been feeling off. It started with trouble sleeping, feeling exhausted for no reason, and that nagging feeling that something was always wrong. But as the weeks went by, it got worse. There were days when even getting out of bed felt impossible, and she had begun to miss some of her classes.

The whispers behind her back had already started. “Why is she always so late?” “She’s probably just lazy. Who gets that sad all the time?” It didn’t take long for the rumors to spread. Her friends seemed to look at her differently, and the other kids started avoiding her. The last thing she wanted was to be a target for their judgment, but it seemed like she had no control over that. Maya felt like she needed to get so many things off her chest, but talking about her feelings wasn’t something she was used to. She had learned the hard way that people didn’t understand. “Mental health” was just another term for being weak, according to classmates she’d overheard. They didn’t get it, and Maya wasn’t sure she could make them.

That night, Maya did something she hadn’t considered before—she looked up mental health resources online. She found a website with stories from other teens who had struggled with depression, anxiety, and more. They talked about feeling like they were drowning, but also about how they had found ways to rise above it. One thing the stories had in common was the need to take that first step and talk to someone.

The next day, Maya decided that she was tired of hiding and pretending she was fine when she wasn’t. In the middle of lunch, when her friend Sophia sat down next to her, Maya took a deep breath.

“Sophia, there’s something I need to tell you,” Maya said. “I’ve been feeling really... off lately. Like, I’m not me. It’s hard to explain, but it’s not just being sad. I’m struggling with my mental health, and it’s been really hard for me.”

Sophia’s eyes softened. “I had no idea, Maya. Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

“I didn’t want you to think I was crazy or weak,” Maya admitted.

Sophia shook her head. “That’s not weakness, Maya. That’s just part of being human. I’m here for you, okay?”

Maya smiled, feeling a little lighter. She and Sophia continued to chat through lunch, and when she got home, Maya made an appointment with a counselor. Knowing that she had the support of at least one friend who didn’t judge her or think there was something “wrong” with her gave Maya hope that the stigma around mental health could actually be broken—one conversation at a time.





# STIGMA



**SCHOOL**

**HOME**

**MENTORS**

**FRIENDS**

**WHAT CAN I DO  
TO ADDRESS  
STIGMA IN MY  
OWN LIFE?**

**HOW DOES STIGMA AFFECT ME AND OTHERS?**

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# CHAPTER 5: GRIEF



YOU ARE NOT ALONE.  
HEALING IS NOT LINEAR.

# **GRIEF.** IT'S NOT JUST SADNESS.

## **THINGS TO REMEMBER:**



**EXPERIENCING GRIEF CAN BRING MANY DIFFERENT AND UNEXPECTED EMOTIONS.**

**GRIEVING DOES NOT HAVE TO HAPPEN IN ISOLATION. THERE IS SUPPORT FOR YOU. REACH OUT.**



**DON'T FORGET TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, TOO. YOUR FEELINGS ARE VALID AND REAL. EVERYBODY COPEs DIFFERENTLY, AND THAT IS OK.**

**MOVING ON DOES NOT MEAN FORGETTING ABOUT YOUR LOSS. IT MEANS TAKING THE NEXT STEP FORWARD.**



# **CHAPTER 5: GRIEF STORY**

Jimmy was a happy boy who did well in school and was fun to be around. When his teacher, Mrs. Charles, announced that there would be a Show and Tell on Monday, Jimmy was excited to bring his pet turtle, Shelly, and introduce him to his classmates. But over the weekend, Shelly suddenly became very sick, and on Sunday evening, passed away.

Jimmy was almost too upset to even go to school the next day, but his older sister Melanie assured him that things would be OK and walked with him all the way to his classroom. He was very quiet during the morning, and when his turn came for Show and Tell, he simply stayed at his desk, arms crossed and silent. When his classmates asked what was wrong, Jimmy lashed out and yelled at them, even calling some of them inappropriate names. When Mrs. Charles tried to calm him down, he yelled at her too and ran out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Mrs. Charles came out to check on him and was surprised to find him crying in the hallway. Jimmy felt too embarrassed to tell the truth about why he was so upset and turned his back to his teacher. The more questions she asked, the more Jimmy shut down. Mrs. Charles was frustrated but could tell that her student was definitely in some kind of pain.

A minute later the bell rang, and kids began to flood the hallway. One of them was Melanie, who saw her little brother and his teacher standing outside of their classroom. She came over and offered Jimmy a hug, telling Mrs. Charles about what had happened to Shelly the night before. Everything now made sense. Mrs. Charles made a deal with Jimmy: If he needed some time to gather himself, that would be a good idea, and of course, he could skip Show and Tell. She then told Jimmy about how sad she and her family were a few months earlier when they lost their dog, Duke. She said that if Jimmy ever wanted to talk about it outside of class time, she would be happy to be there for him.

When Jimmy finally returned to class, he apologized to his friends and told them about Shelly. Everyone understood, and many of them had been through something similar themselves. It felt good to talk about it and to know that he was not overreacting about something very sad. Even though he was still in pain, Jimmy felt much better by the end of the day.

When they got home, Melanie made ice cream sundaes for the two of them and they reminisced about the day their parents had brought Shelly home. They made a plan to have a small ceremony for Shelly in the backyard, and after dinner that night, Jimmy and Melanie sat down with their parents and talked about looking into finding a new family pet. The grief Jimmy felt over losing his turtle was still there, and he missed him very much, but having his family—and especially his big sister—around helped him make sense of his feelings and ease his sorrow.

## EXAMPLE:



**EMBRACING LIFE**  
Initiative



**WHAT IS ON THE OUTSIDE**  
ACTION/BEHAVIOUR

ANXIETY  
STRESS  
DENIAL  
CONFUSION

**WHAT IS ON THE INSIDE**  
FEELING

**GRIEF**

**WHAT IS THE ROOT CAUSE**



## MY TREE:



**OUTSIDE**

**INSIDE**

**ROOT CAUSE(S)**

# **CHAPTER 6: WARNING SIGNS**

**THE PRESENCE OF MULTIPLE WARNING SIGNS OR RISK FACTORS CAN PUT SOMEONE AT HIGHER RISK OF NEGATIVE MENTAL HEALTH. HERE ARE SOME WARNING SIGNS TO BE AWARE OF:**

- **INCREASED ALCOHOL OR DRUG USE**
- **FEELING TRAPPED**
- **WITHDRAWING FROM ACTIVITIES**
- **ISOLATING FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS**
- **DEPRESSION**
- **ANXIETY**
- **EASILY AGITATED**



- **FEELING LIKE A BURDEN**
- **FEELING HOPELESS**
- **NO SENSE OF PURPOSE**
- **DRAMATIC MOOD CHANGES**
- **SLEEPING TOO MUCH**
- **ACTING RECKLESS/ENGAGING IN RISKY ACTIVITIES**
- **UNBEARABLE PAIN**



**RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF NEGATIVE MENTAL HEALTH IN YOURSELF AND OTHERS IS VERY IMPORTANT. IF YOU KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THESE THINGS, YOU COULD HELP TO SAVE A LIFE.**





# **CHAPTER 6: WARNING SIGNS STORY**

Emily was the light of every party. She had a large circle of friends, loved to have fun, and made everyone around her feel good. Yet over the past few weeks, something had changed. The lively social butterfly had begun to withdraw. She turned down invitations for social gatherings and even began avoiding her friends when they wanted to get together to watch a movie or go out for lunch. She would rarely respond to texts and often let her phone go to voicemail. The change in Emily's behaviour had not been going on for long, but it was beginning to worry some of her friends.

One afternoon, after she missed a coffee date with her friend Sarah, Emily received a text:

"Hey, just checking in. You didn't come for coffee. Is everything OK?"

"Yeah, just been busy with work and stuff."

"You sure? You don't seem like yourself lately."

"I'm fine, I promise. Nothing to worry about."

"Ok well, reach out if you need me. I'm always here for you."

Two days later, Sarah had not heard from Emily at all. After one more day without contact, Sarah finally decided to go to Emily's house to check on her. When she rang the doorbell, Emily's voice faintly came through from the other side, asking her to go away. Sarah then knocked on the door and shouted back that she was worried, and that she wasn't going anywhere. When Emily finally opened the door, Sarah's heart sank. Her friend, usually so bright and bubbly, looked tired and worn out, like she hadn't slept all week. Emily had obviously been wearing the same clothes for days, and her eyes looked as though she had only finished crying a moment before opening the door. As soon as she saw Sarah's reaction, tears began to slide down Emily's cheek.

Sarah came in and made tea for the two of them and then just sat with her friend, patiently. Eventually Emily began to confide in her that she had been struggling with anxiety and depression, and she couldn't even locate the reasons why. Sarah listened quietly though, asking questions when she felt it was appropriate, and offering comfort and encouragement. By the time Sarah left, they had made a plan for her to return the next day and accompany Emily to the doctor, who would be able to help in ways that Sarah and their friends couldn't. She also let Emily know that she was not alone, and that she had a lot of people around her who loved her and would help her in whatever ways she needed.

On her way home, Sarah stopped by the library and took out books about mental illness and how to look for warning signs. She knew she had been a good friend that day but that there was also a lot of work ahead if she was going to be a support for Emily. The good news was, the two of them were off to a very hopeful start.

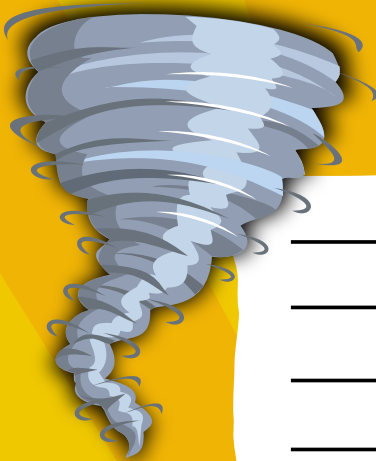




# **WARNING SIGNS**

## **MY WARNING SIGNS**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> INCREASED ALCOHOL OR DRUG USE     | <input type="checkbox"/> FEELING LIKE A BURDEN                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FEELING TRAPPED                   | <input type="checkbox"/> FEELING HOPELESS                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> WITHDRAWING FROM ACTIVITIES       | <input type="checkbox"/> NO SENSE OF PURPOSE                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ISOLATING FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY | <input type="checkbox"/> DRAMATIC MOOD CHANGES                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> DEPRESSION                        | <input type="checkbox"/> SLEEPING TOO MUCH                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ANXIETY                           | <input type="checkbox"/> UNBEARABLE PAIN                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> EASILY AGITATED                   | <input type="checkbox"/> ACTING RECKLESS/ENGAGING IN RISKY ACTIVITIES |



## **HOW DO I RECOGNIZE MY PERSONAL WARNING SIGNS?**

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## **HOW CAN I RECOGNIZE WARNING SIGNS IN FRIENDS AND FAMILY?**

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# CHAPTER 7: PROTECTIVE FACTORS

PROTECTIVE FACTORS ARE ATTRIBUTES THAT INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES HAVE TO HELP CONTROL OR ELIMINATE THE RISK OF SUICIDE. HERE IS A LIST OF PROTECTIVE FACTORS TO BE AWARE OF:

- STRONG PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS
- POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE
- SPIRITUAL BELIEF OR FAITH
- CLOSE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
- STRONG PEER SUPPORT SYSTEMS
- INVOLVEMENT IN ACTIVITIES OR HOBBIES
- COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS
- ACCESS TO RESOURCES
- HEALTHY ADULT OR MENTOR

THE PRESENCE OF MULTIPLE PROTECTIVE FACTORS CAN HELP REDUCE THE RISK OF SUICIDAL BEHAVIORS. THE MORE PROTECTIVE FACTORS A PERSON HAS, THE LOWER THE POTENTIAL RISK FOR SUICIDE.



**BE KIND. ACCEPT. EMPOWER. SMILE. EMBRACE.**



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# CHAPTER 7: PROTECTIVE FACTORS STORY

Ethan was a kind and quiet person, active in the community and always ready to help others. But lately life had been getting to him. His mother had recently died of cancer, and he had subsequently become detached from his relationships with his father and brother. He had started a small landscaping business the previous summer, and he loved the work, but was beginning to struggle financially, having just enough money to get from one job to the next, with nothing much left over for hobbies or fun. The combination of loss, uncertainty, and loneliness had caused him to wonder if life was worth living.

One day while Ethan was cleaning out the gutters for one of his clients, he slipped off the ladder and had to call a friend to drive him to the clinic. While the physician, Dr. McKenzie, was examining his arm, she noticed that Ethan was hardly paying attention to anything she was saying. She had been seeing Ethan as a patient for years and could tell that something wasn't right, beyond the pain in his arm. After some gentle persuasion, Ethan began to open up about the problems he was facing and the way he had been feeling.

Dr. McKenzie had another appointment coming up, but she understood that this was an important time for her patient. While she listened to him speak, she wrote down some notes, and when he was finished, Dr. McKenzie showed him her note pad. It was a list that included Ethan's father and brother, his business, and even his friend who had driven him to the clinic, and who Dr. McKenzie suggested represented all his friends. She had also taken notes about his relationship with the larger community and all the volunteer work he had done to improve the lives of the unhoused in their small town. Ethan was actually surprised at how many good and positive things were listed there right in front him.

"There's actually a name for all this," Dr. McKenzie said. "We call them protective factors - these are the people and things and activities that keep us grounded and that give us strength, especially when things get hard. They're not necessarily the same for everyone, either. Life has been very tough for you lately, and you've been struggling to cope. That's totally OK. But you do have protective factors all around you. Sometimes we just need someone else to point them out for us. Even your kindness and what you mean to others are protective factors that can be easy to miss."

They agreed to book a follow-up appointment to check on Ethan's arm in the next two weeks, and in the meantime Dr. McKenzie made a referral for Ethan to see a mental health worker who could help him sort out the negative feelings he had been having. Ethan still felt sad and slightly fed up with how his life was going, but as he left Dr. McKenzie's office, he felt more hopeful than he had in a very long time. When he got home, he pulled out his phone, took a breath, and made the call he had been putting off for too long.

"Hey Dad. It's me."

# PROTECTIVE FACTORS

## MY PROTECTIVE FACTORS:

- ☐ STRONG PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS
- ☐ POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE
- ☐ SPIRITUAL BELIEF OR FAITH
- ☐ CLOSE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
- ☐ STRONG PEER SUPPORT SYSTEMS
- ☐ INVOLVEMENT IN ACTIVITIES OR HOBBIES
- ☐ COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS
- ☐ ACCESS TO RESOURCES
- ☐ HEALTHY ADULT/MENTOR
- ☐ OTHER: 

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## HOW CAN I DEVELOP MORE PROTECTIVE FACTORS?

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# **CHAPTER 8: NATURAL SUPPORTS**

**WHAT ARE NATURAL SUPPORTS?**

**NATURAL SUPPORTS ARE PEOPLE ALL AROUND US WHO WE CAN LOOK TO FOR SUPPORT. THESE PEOPLE CAN BE FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS, TEACHERS, COACHES, COMMUNITY MEMBERS, CO-WORKERS, PEERS, ETC.**

**WHY DO WE NEED NATURAL SUPPORTS?**

**HARD THINGS ARE HARDER TO GO THROUGH ALONE. THAT IS WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO IDENTIFY YOUR COMMUNITY OF NATURAL SUPPORTS. YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM SHOULD BE THE PEOPLE YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE AROUND, AND WHO YOU CAN OPEN UP TO.**

**WHAT DO NATURAL SUPPORTS DO?**

**EVERYBODY HAS NATURAL SUPPORTS. YOU WANT YOUR SUPPORTERS TO CHEER YOU ON WHEN YOU NEED IT, BE GOOD LISTENERS, CARE ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS, AND ENCOURAGE YOU TO BE THE BEST VERSION OF YOURSELF!**

**HOW TO FIND YOUR NATURAL SUPPORTS?**

**YOU CAN FIND YOUR NATURAL SUPPORTS BY ASKING YOURSELF: "WHO CAN I COUNT ON?" OR "WHO HAS BEEN THERE FOR ME IN THE PAST?" THESE QUESTIONS CAN HELP YOU IDENTIFY YOUR SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS.**





# CHAPTER 8: NATURAL SUPPORTS STORY

It started with a simple assignment—an essay for English class, nothing too hard. But for Jayla, the words wouldn't come. The blank page seemed to mock her, the pressure building until her chest felt like it might explode. It wasn't just the essay; lately, it was everything. Her anxiety had been getting worse over the past few weeks, with feelings of hopelessness creeping in like an uninvited guest. By the time she got home, she couldn't stop the tears.

Jayla didn't know what to do. It felt terrible to cry for what felt like no reason, or minor reasons, or stupid reasons. She didn't want to talk to anyone. Talking was too hard. But at the same time, she couldn't be alone. She scrolled through her texts until she found the last one from her brother, Eli. He had sent it the day before and she had not yet replied.

“Hey, haven't heard from u. U okay?”

After changing her response several times, she texted back: “Sort of. Not really. I dunno. I'm fine, just not feeling great.”

Within seconds Eli wrote back: “That sucks. Well I was about to go for a walk. Wanna come?”

Even though she didn't much feel like it, something in the simplicity of Eli's offer compelled Jayla to agree. Maybe she just needed to get out of her head for a while. Maybe she needed something other than her thoughts to hold onto.

She put on her jacket and met Eli outside. He didn't ask questions, didn't try to push her to talk. He just walked beside her, his presence easy and calm. They wandered through their neighborhood, talking about small, unimportant things. It wasn't the loud, bombastic support Jayla had imagined she needed, the kind of dramatic conversation where everything is laid bare. It was just her little brother, warm and funny as usual, and somehow, that was enough.

By the time they made it back home, the fog inside her head hadn't disappeared, but it felt less oppressive. Later that night, as she lay in bed, Jayla realized that support didn't always come in grand gestures or deep conversations. Sometimes it came in the form of a walk with no expectations, in a person who didn't try to solve your problems, but just stood beside you. Eli hadn't fixed her, nor had he tried to, but he had made her feel seen—something she hadn't realized she was craving so much.

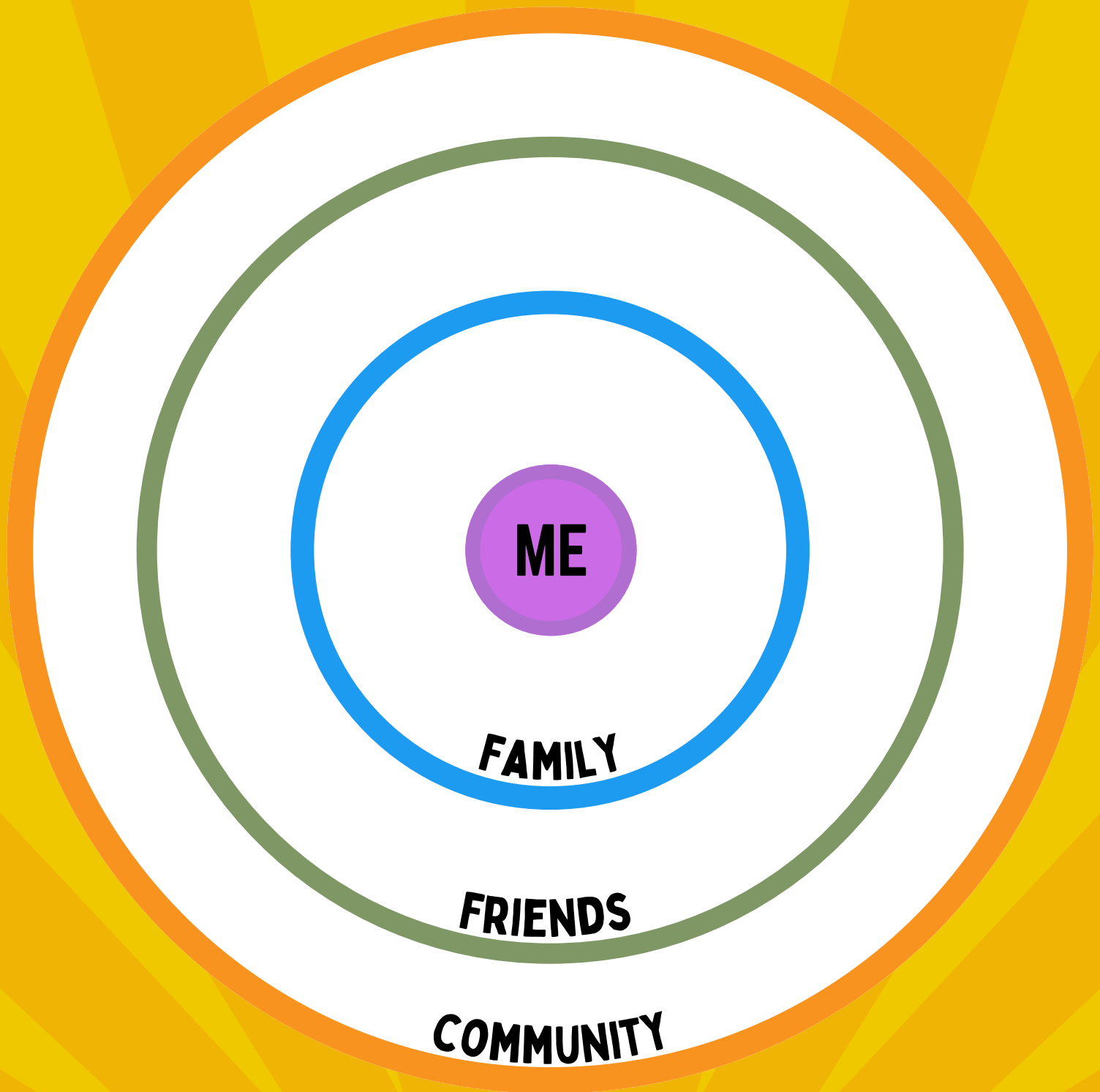
# WHO CAN BE NATURAL SUPPORTS?

U L E M K W F E F P E T Z N G P E P Z H  
 W I M G F F C V M M N C N C J G O W C I  
 I L Z X T E A M M A T E O G H K O K O M  
 Z A U N T Y R B G O D F N A H A E R U Q  
 D E H T L T P P X X C Q X V C G P J M A  
 W S O E P I S B O S S O H O L H D A F W  
 N E I G H B O U R S K V W K Q K E C N W  
 H T U S Y F K L J F H Q A O F L B S X W  
 O G N I D A Y Z F P F F W F R C C Q D T  
 C R C L O T R N M M X A R L R K I D O M  
 O A L W Y H P C C N O T M I K W E Z V E  
 U N E B O E N Z U R R O E I E O O R M N  
 S D S P D R Z T I E I D S Z L N D M O T  
 I P S I B L I N G S Y S V H B Y D E T O  
 N A G T E A C H E R S N I E U I H S H R  
 S F N N X F N Y D U W Y E S L M R N E Q  
 U I B O H W Y B J R I M Q S L P W M R J  
 Q R C Y K G R A N D M A J C T I S I L N  
 Q D K R R O X X I F C E K D S G N V C T  
 G W Y E E T M J R A D O Z Y P R O E Y D

- MOTHER
- FATHER
- FRIENDS
- KOKOM
- NOKOM
- CHAPAN
- MOOSHUM
- GRANDMA
- GRANDPA
- TEACHERS
- COACHES
- COWORKER
- TEAMMATE
- AUNTY
- UNCLE
- SIBLINGS
- COUSINS
- FAMILY
- PET
- BOSS
- MENTOR
- CRISIS LINE
- NEIGHBOURS
- ME



# WHO ARE MY NATURAL SUPPORTS?



## WHO DO I NATURALLY SUPPORT?

A large, empty white rounded rectangular box for writing.



# **CHAPTER 9: HOW TO BE A SUPPORT**

**HOW WILL I KNOW WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE REACHES OUT TO ME?**

**NOT KNOWING WHAT TO SAY CAN BE SCARY, BUT  
REMEMBER: IT'S NOT ABOUT SOLVING PROBLEMS. IT'S  
ABOUT SUPPORTING, LISTENING, AND BEING KIND.**

- **BE PATIENT. THIS IS NOT EASY.**
- **ASK DIRECT QUESTIONS.**
- **EMBRACE THE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP.**
- **BE A LISTENER FIRST.**
- **VALIDATE WHAT THEY ARE FEELING.**
- **LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGMENT.**
- **CONTINUE TO CHECK IN AFTERWARDS.**
- **BEING AUTHENTIC IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN BEING PERFECT.**
- **HAVE FAITH IN YOURSELF. THEY CAME TO YOU FOR A REASON.**



## **WHAT THIS CAN LOOK LIKE:**

**"I'M RIGHT  
HERE WITH  
YOU"**

**"I'LL LOVE YOU  
NO MATTER  
WHAT"**

**"WE'RE GOING TO  
GET THROUGH  
THIS TOGETHER"**



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# **CHAPTER 9: HOW TO BE A SUPPORT STORY**

Lena stared at her phone in disbelief. The text from Cass, her best friend, was blunt and terrifying: “I don’t think I can keep going.” Lena read the message over and over. Cass had always been the strong one, the confident friend who made everyone laugh and kept things light. She had never shown signs of being in pain, at least not like this.

Lena took a shaky breath and quickly typed a reply: “Cass, what’s going on??? Talk to me.” After a minute, Cass responded: “I just feel like everything’s been falling apart. I don’t know how to fix it. I don’t even want to anymore.”

Lena was even more concerned now, but she knew that receiving these messages at all meant Cass was reaching out for help, even if Cass didn’t realize it. Lena wrote back: “Hey can I call you? I just want to hear your voice.”

The response came quickly: “Okay... yeah.”

When her friend picked up, there was a long silence on the other end. Cass’s voice was barely a whisper, but it was enough to break Lena’s heart.

“I don’t know what to do,” Cass said. “I’m so messed up, like something’s broken inside.”

“Cass, I’m so sorry. You’re my best friend, and I care about you so much. I don’t have all the answers, but we’ll figure this out together, okay?”

“I just... I don’t even know where to begin,” Cass said. “I don’t even know what’s wrong.”

“You don’t have to know that stuff right now. You just have to know that you’re important. And you matter. More than you know. I don’t know where to begin either but we’ll get there.”

They talked for an hour, about the things that were weighing on Cass’s heart, about the dark thoughts she had been battling. Cass did most of the talking, while Lena quietly listened. By the time they hung up, Cass sounded a little more hopeful, and Lena felt a quiet strength settling inside her. They agreed to meet the next day just to hang out and maybe watch a movie. If Cass wanted to talk things out some more or work on a plan for addressing how she was feeling, they could do that, too.

It took longer than usual, but eventually Lena fell asleep, thinking about her friend and how being a light for someone could sometimes be as simple as being present in their darkness.

# HOW CAN I SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO IS FEELING...

**ANGER?**

**FEAR?**

**ANXIETY?**

**GUILT/SHAME?**

**LONELINESS?**

**SADNESS?**



# CHAPTER 10: RESOURCES

## 24/7 SUICIDE CRISIS LINE: CALL OR TEXT

**988 OR GO TO 988.CA**

### **SASKATCHEWAN HEALTH LINE**

DIAL "811"

[HTTPS://WWW.SASKHEALTHAUTHORITY.CA/](https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/)

### **KIDS HELP PHONE**

[WWW.KIDSHELPPHONE.CA](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

1-800-668-6868

YOUTH TEXT "CONNECT" TO 686868

ADULTS TEXT "WELLNESS" TO 741741

### **YOUTH SPACE**

[WWW.YOUTHSPACE.CA](http://www.youthspace.ca)

TEXT - 778 783 0177

### **INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS SUPPORT LINE**

1-800-721-0066

### **FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT HOPE FOR WELLNESS HELPLINE**

[WWW.HOPEFORWELLNESS.CA](http://www.hopeforwellness.ca)

1-855-242-3310

### **CRISIS SERVICES CANADA - SUICIDE PREVENTION AND SUPPORT**

1-833-456-4566

**IF THERE IS AN EMERGENCY, OR IF  
YOU NEED IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE,  
PLEASE CALL 911**

### **EMBRACING LIFE**

[WWW.EMBRACINGLIFESK.COM](http://www.embracinglifesk.com)

EMBRACINGLIFESK@GMAIL.COM

### **TALKING STICK**

[HTTPS://MY.TALKINGSTICK.APP/](https://my.talkingstick.app/)

[#/GUEST/HOME](#)

INFO@TALKINGSTICK.APP

### **TRANS LIFELINE**

[WWW.TRANSLIFELINE.ORG](http://www.translifeline.org)

(877) 330-6366

### **LGBTQ2S+ CRISIS SUPPORT**

1-800-268-9688

TEXT - 647-694-4275

ONLINE CHAT: [WWW.YOUTHLINE.CA](http://www.youthline.ca)

### **OUT SASKATOON**

[WWW.OUTSASKATOON.CA](http://www.outsaskatoon.ca)

HELLO@OUTSASKATOON.CA

1-306-665-1224

### **MOBILE CRISIS LINE**

(306) 764-1011 PRINCE ALBERT

(306) 933-6200 SASKATOON

(306) 757-0127 REGINA





# EMBRACING LIFE APP

## HOW CAN I HELP OTHERS?

- **HELPFUL CONVERSATIONS**
  - STEP BY STEP CONVERSATION GUIDE TO HELPING OTHERS
- **RESOURCES**
  - CONTACTS AND LINKS
  - MORE INFORMATION ON HELPING OTHERS
  - SUICIDE WARNINGS
  - SUICIDE MYTHS & RECOVERING



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## HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF?

- **MY JOURNEY**
  - HOW DIFFICULT WAS MY DAY?
  - HOW DO I FEEL TODAY?
  - WHAT'S WEIGHING ME DOWN?
  - WHAT ARE MY GOALS FOR TOMORROW?
  - WHAT ARE TODAY'S "FEEL GOODS?"
- **GRATITUDE BOX**
- **SAFETY PLAN**
- **RESOURCES**

# **CHAPTER 10: RESOURCES STORY**

Kendra had always enjoyed helping others. She'd volunteered at the local community centre for years, organizing events, tutoring younger kids, and lending a hand wherever it was needed. One afternoon, she was sitting at the front desk of the community centre when Mr. Robillard, a quiet man in his mid-fifties who had recently moved into the neighbourhood, walked in. He shuffled up to her, his voice barely a whisper. "I—I need help," he said.

Kendra smiled. "Of course, Mr. Robillard. What's going on?"

"I don't know who else to turn to. I've been feeling like I can't keep going, like everything's just... too much. I can't focus on anything anymore. I just feel... lost."

Kendra nodded with sympathy. She had read about depression and suicide awareness in her youth volunteer training, but hearing someone express those feelings face-to-face hit harder than she'd expected.

"Mr. Robillard," she said gently, "I'm really glad you came to talk to me. I know it's not easy, but there are people who can help, people who can support you through this."

Mr. Robillard looked at her with a skeptical glance. "You really think anyone can help? It's been so long, I don't know if anyone can fix it now."

Kendra nodded again. "It's not about fixing everything right away. But there are professionals, counselors, and support groups who can work with you. They're trained to help people who feel like you do. I can help you get in touch with them if you'd like."

"I think I could use that," he said after a moment. "Actually, I think that's why I came here."

Kendra smiled, relieved. "Okay. I know a couple of places that offer mental health support. There's a hotline for immediate help, and there's a local clinic with counselors who specialize in exactly what you're going through. If you're ready, I can help you make the first call. It's okay if you're not sure yet, but I'm here for you either way."

Mr. Robillard nodded. "I'll try," he said, his voice still fragile, but less uncertain.

Kendra gave him the information on a piece of paper, writing down the mental health hotline and the clinic's contact details. "I'll be here, Mr. Robillard. You're not alone in this."

As Mr. Robillard left, Kendra knew his road ahead wouldn't be easy, but he had taken the first step. For her part, she knew it wasn't about offering easy solutions, but offering hope, one small connection at a time.

# RESOURCES

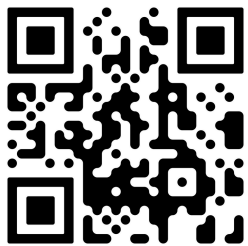
## WHAT RESOURCES WILL I USE?

- 
- 
- 



## WHAT RESOURCES WILL I RECOMMEND TO A FRIEND?

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- 
- 



## HOW WILL THE EMBRACING LIFE APP HELP?



HELP MYSELF

HELP OTHERS

# **CHAPTER 11: HOW TO REACH OUT FOR HELP**

- **FIND SOMEONE WHO YOU ARE COMFORTABLE AROUND WHO YOU CAN TRUST. IF YOU DON'T THINK YOU HAVE ANYONE TO TALK TO, REACH OUT TO A MOBILE CRISIS LINE OR CRISIS CENTRE.**
- **DECIDE AN APPROPRIATE TIME AND PLACE WHERE YOU ARE SAFE AND CAN BE HONEST.**
- **TELL THEM HONESTLY WHAT YOU ARE THINKING AND FEELING.**
- **NAME YOUR EMOTIONS THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS TO HELP YOUR SUPPORTER HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT YOU ARE EXPERIENCING.**
- **TRY TO CLEARLY EXPRESS HOW YOU ARE FEELING AND HOW MUCH YOU ARE STRUGGLING.**
- **BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF. THIS IS DIFFICULT!**

## **WHAT THIS CAN LOOK LIKE:**

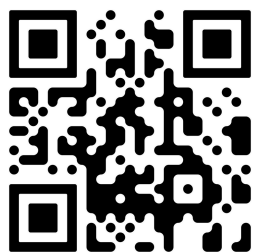
"HEY, I'M  
STRUGGLING RIGHT  
NOW. I'VE BEEN  
FEELING REALLY  
DOWN."

"I WANT TO TALK TO A  
THERAPIST/DOCTOR TO  
HELP ME THROUGH THIS.  
WILL YOU HELP ME FIND  
ONE?"

"HI. CAN YOU HELP ME  
FIND SOME SUPPORT  
WITH MY MENTAL  
HEALTH? I'M NOT  
OKAY."

**REACHING OUT IS NOT ALWAYS EASY. IF YOU DON'T FEEL COMFORTABLE ENOUGH TO TELL SOMEONE WHAT IS GOING ON, YOU COULD TRY OUT THE EMBRACING LIFE APP.**

**SCAN THIS QR CODE TO  
DOWNLOAD THE APP**



# CHAPTER 11: HOW TO REACH OUT FOR HELP STORY

Ava was a grade twelve student who was feeling wary about the next steps after graduation. Every time she thought about her plans for next year, she found herself having feelings of anxiety and panic. She had tried to speak with her parents about it, but they said it was natural to feel anxious at her stage in life and that she would feel better once she got to university. But Ava wasn't even sure she wanted to go to university. She didn't know what she wanted. That was part of the problem.

Confused and frustrated, Ava decided to see the school guidance counselor, Mrs. Roberts, to see if she could help.

"I've been feeling down and really nervous about what I am going to do next year," Ava said. "Every time I think about it, I can't seem to catch my breath. I don't know what's wrong."

Mrs. Roberts looked at Ava warmly and let her know this was often an intimidating time for students, but that her job was to listen. "Everything here is confidential," she said. "You can think of me as a sounding board if you want. Sometimes just talking about something, about anything, can lead to progress."

Ava began talking about the classes she was signed up for the next semester, and within minutes was surprised to find herself pouring her heart out, going into detail about the thoughts that plagued her mind over the last few months.

Mrs. Roberts did not dismiss her feelings or tell her to cheer up. Instead, she listened patiently and then said, "Ava, I'm so glad you came to me about this. That step alone indicates strength. The first step is always the hardest."

Together they discussed some common anti-anxiety exercises that Ava could try, and they talked about goal-setting and how to obtain tiny victories that could help spur momentum. Mrs. Roberts also suggested that Ava confide in her friends—there was a very good chance some of them were feeling the same way Ava was. Plus, Mrs. Roberts said, there were a number of online resources that could help, like the Talking Stick app which could connect Ava to others with similar experiences, and the Embracing Life app, a tool designed to help with mindfulness and emotional tracking. "And you can come see me any time," Mrs. Roberts added.

As the weeks went by and Ava continued to work on her goals, she gained a sense of control over her emotions. She learned that positive mental health is a journey, not a destination, and that reaching out for help was the best thing she could've done.



# HOW TO REACH OUT FOR HELP



**WHO CAN I REACH OUT TO WHEN I'M STRUGGLING?**

- 
- 
- 



**WHAT RESOURCES CAN I USE TO HELP MYSELF?**

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- 
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- 



**HOW CAN I IDENTIFY SOMEONE TO TALK TO?**

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# **CHAPTER 12: HOW TO HELP MYSELF**



**ALTHOUGH IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO RECOGNIZE WHEN YOU ARE STRUGGLING AND HOW TO REACH OUT, THERE ARE STRATEGIES THAT CAN MAKE THE PROCESS EASIER.**

## **HOW YOU FEEL:**

**THERE IS NOT ONE RIGHT WAY TO FEEL WHEN DEALING WITH BIG FEELINGS. IT IS COMPLETELY NORMAL FOR YOUR EMOTIONS TO CHANGE FROM DAY TO DAY. THERE IS NO SPECIFIC TIME FRAME FOR GRIEVING. HOW LONG IT TAKES DIFFERS FROM PERSON TO PERSON.**

## **HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES:**

### **PROBLEM-FOCUSED:**

- **PRACTICE TIME MANAGEMENT**
- **SET GOALS**
- **CREATE TO-DO LISTS**
- **FORM HEALTHY BOUNDARIES**
- **ASK FOR SUPPORT**

### **EMOTION-FOCUSED:**

- **EXERCISE**
- **SELF CARE**
- **POSITIVE SELF TALK**
- **MEDITATION**
- **BREATHING EXERCISES**

**HEALING IS NOT A LINEAR PROCESS. IT MAY EBB AND FLOW DAILY AND YOU MAY HAVE MANY EMOTIONS AT THE SAME TIME.**



# **HOW TO HELP MYSELF** **THE POWER OF MINDSET**

## **WHAT IS MINDSET?**

- THE CAPABILITY TO SHAPE YOUR MIND AND BEHAVIOURS, AND ACHIEVE GOALS.
- A SET OF ATTITUDES AND ASSUMPTIONS HELD BY A PERSON.



## **THE BREAK-DOWN: MINDSET IS A CHOICE.**

**YOUR MINDSET IS HOW YOU SEE THE WORLD, AND WHAT IS POSSIBLE FOR YOU WITHIN THAT WORLD.**

- REQUIRES CONSISTENT EFFORT AND PRACTICE.
- REINFORCES POSITIVE HABITS (PERSISTENCE, OPTIMISM, RESILIENCE).
- BUILDS EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE.

## **WHAT AM I IN CONTROL OF?**

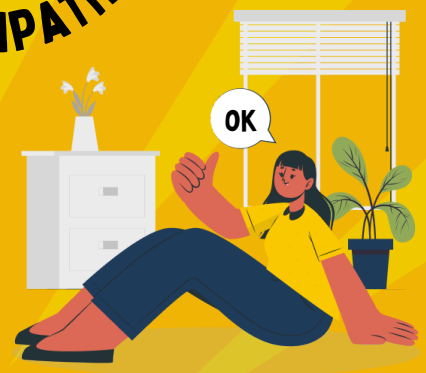
**YOUR ACTIONS. YOUR REACTIONS. YOUR KINDNESS. YOUR EMPATHY. YOUR PATIENCE.**

# **YOURSELF.**

## **HOW TO STAY POSITIVE:**

**NAME YOUR THOUGHTS. ACCEPT WHAT YOU CANNOT CHANGE.**

**MEDITATE. SHIFT YOUR PERSPECTIVE. THINK POSITIVE. WRITE DOWN YOUR STRUGGLES. TRY FOCUSED DISTRACTION. SEEK SUPPORT.**



# **CHAPTER 12: HOW TO HELP MYSELF STORY**

Bobby had been avoiding talking to anyone about what was going on. For months now, he had been wrestling with unfamiliar feelings and dark thoughts, finding himself in a state of worry or sometimes even panic when he thought about his life, his family, and the world around him. Everything seemed to be going downhill, and even the simplest joys in life had abandoned him. Scariest of all was the question he couldn't answer: "What is going on with me?"

After another sleepless night, Bobby decided that he had to know; he needed to understand what he was feeling. So, he typed into the search bar: "anxiety and depression symptoms in teenagers."

The list that popped up felt both comforting and terrifying. His heart skipped a beat as he read through the descriptions. "Constant worry," "restlessness," "lack of energy," "feeling worthless." It was like someone had written a description of his life for the past few months: the overwhelming heaviness; the exhaustion that didn't come from physical activity but from simply existing; the intense waves of worry that hit him out of nowhere and seemingly for no reason at all; the constant self-doubt; the fear that he wasn't good enough.

But then he saw another section: Coping Mechanisms and Techniques. His eyes focused on those words. He clicked the link. He read about mindfulness techniques, breathing exercises, and the power of regular physical activity. There were tips for grounding techniques when he felt his anxiety rising, and suggestions for journaling when his emotions felt too tangled to make sense of. He read about the importance of reaching out to others and talking about what was going on, the one thing he'd most been avoiding.

Bobby let out a slow breath, feeling the tiniest flicker of hope. These techniques, though small, seemed like steps he could take. He bookmarked the page, promising himself he would try at least one of these exercises each day.

His eyes wandered to the next tab he had opened: Find a therapist or doctor. He wasn't quite ready for that, so he bookmarked that page, too, and the next morning, called the local clinic to make an appointment.

Bobby felt a rush of relief wash over him as he hung up the phone. It wasn't perfect. It wasn't easy. But it was a start. The road ahead wouldn't be quick or easy, but for the first time in a long while, Bobby felt like he wasn't so alone on it.

# HOW TO HELP MYSELF

## HOW CAN I COPE?

- ☐ DEEP BREATHING
- ☐ JOURNALING
- ☐ MINDFULNESS
- ☐ POSITIVE SELF TALK
- ☐ PRACTICING SELF CARE
- ☐ HUMOR AND LAUGHTER
- ☐ ART OR MUSIC
- ☐ EXERCISE
- ☐ HOBBIES

## BOX BREATHING TECHNIQUE:



**WHAT IS IN MY CONTROL?**

A large, empty white circle with a thick black outline, intended for the user to write down what is in their control.

**WHAT IS OUT OF MY CONTROL?**

A large, empty white circle with a thick black outline, intended for the user to write down what is out of their control.



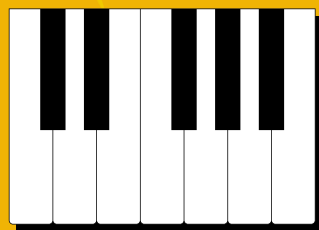
# **CHAPTER 13: STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE**

**BEING RESILIENT MEANS YOU CAN GO THROUGH DIFFICULT THINGS AND LEARN FROM THEM. CHECKING IN WITH YOURSELF AND OTHERS WHEN YOU'RE STRUGGLING HELPS TO CREATE BRIDGES OF RESILIENCY AND HOPE.**



**FOCUSING ON BUILDING EVERYDAY STRENGTHS AND FINDING THE POSITIVES IN YOUR LIFE CAN BUILD CONFIDENCE AND RESILIENCY. EVERY PERSON HAS A SUPERPOWER.**

**REMEMBER THAT EVERYONE HAS TALENTS OR GIFTS -- YOU JUST HAVE TO FIND YOURS!**



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# CHAPTER 13: STRENGTH & RESILIENCE STORY

Jill sat alone and exhausted in her small apartment. It had been one of those weeks where everything felt overwhelming: Her job, the endless emails that made her feel like she was drowning, the loneliness that gnawed at her when she wasn't busy. For a while now, she had felt like she was stuck in a loop, her thoughts spiraling, drowning in a sea of uncertainty, but tonight it felt worse than usual.

She had felt this way before, back when she was younger, when life had been even harder. Her family had struggled through poverty, and she had learned early on what it felt like to watch her parents fight, to see the cracks in everything she thought was stable.

But she had made it through those years. There had been times when she wanted to give up, times when everything felt impossible, but there had been one thing she had carried with her through it all: resilience. A quiet, stubborn strength she had inherited from her mother, who also knew a thing or two about perseverance.

Jill closed her eyes, remembering the sound of her mother's voice in those moments. She had used that strength to get through high school and then college, to build a life for herself despite the odds. But now, as she sat in her apartment, overwhelmed by the weight of adulthood, she realized she had forgotten how to tap into that well of inner strength. The exhaustion of her daily grind had numbed her and made her forget what she was capable of.

You've been here before, she thought. You've survived worse. Flipping through one of her old journals, she found the notes she had written during tough times—reminders to herself about her own resilience. "One step at a time," she had written during one of her hardest moments. "You're stronger than you think."

Reading those words brought a sense of clarity. With a deep breath, Jill picked up her phone and searched for mental health resources. She had always believed in the power of therapy, but somewhere along the way, she had forgotten how to ask for help. It was time to change that. She made an appointment with a therapist, a small step toward taking control of her mental health again. She also set a reminder to call her mother in the morning.

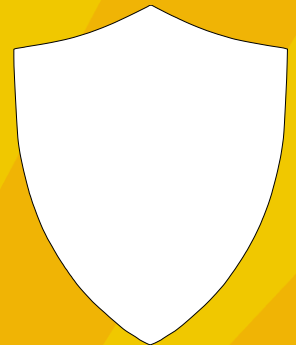
As she sat back down, Jill reassured herself that healing wasn't a straight line. There would still be difficult days, but she was no stranger to hardship. She had been shaped by it, and now, she would use that strength to face the challenges ahead. Her past had taught her that no matter how many times life knocked her down, she had the strength to rise again. And this time, she was ready.

# **STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE**

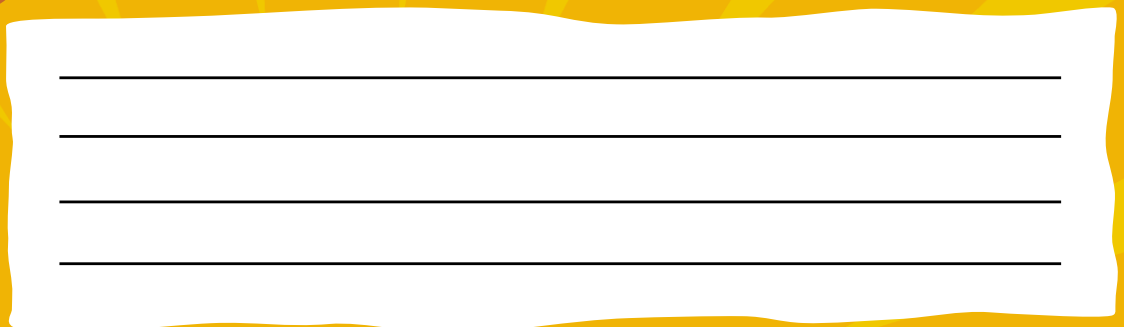


**WHAT ARE MY STRENGTHS?**

**HOW HAVE I BEEN RESILIENT?**



**WHAT ARE SOME GOALS THAT I CAN SET  
TO REINFORCE MY STRENGTHS?**



# **CHAPTER 14: SAFETY PLANNING**

## **SAFETY PLAN - WHAT IS IT?**

**SAFETY PLANNING IS A PROCESS THAT INVOLVES BRAINSTORMING WAYS TO STAY SAFE IN THE FUTURE. SAFETY PLANNING CAN BE USED TO PREVENT FUTURE RISKS AND CAN HELP TO IDENTIFY YOUR STRENGTHS.**



## **SAFETY PLAN - WHY?**

**SAFETY PLANNING CAN BE USED TO HELP A PERSON WHO MIGHT BE STRUGGLING. A SAFETY PLAN PROVIDES A LIST OF WARNING SIGNS, DISTRACTIONS, AND CIRCLES OF SUPPORT, AND GIVES THE PERSON WRITING IT SOME PROMPTS TO REMEMBER THEIR REASONS TO LIVE.**



## **SAFETY PLAN - HOW?**

**WHEN CREATING YOUR SAFETY PLAN, YOU SHOULD BE IN A POSITIVE HEAD SPACE. IT IS OFTEN HELPFUL TO ASK A PERSON YOU TRUST TO BE WITH YOU NOT ONLY TO SUPPORT YOU BUT ALSO TO REMIND YOU OF YOUR STRENGTHS AND THE POSITIVE THINGS IN YOUR LIFE.**



# CHAPTER 14: SAFETY PLANNING STORY

Coach Harrison stood at the front of the gym, looking at the faces of his team. The school had just learned that morning that a student named Jeff, one of the football team's linebackers, had died by suicide over the weekend. The news had shaken everyone, and Coach Harrison knew that words alone would not be enough to help his players process their grief.

"Guys, I know this is hard," he said. "Losing Jeff is something we never expected. It's a tragedy, and it hurts. But we're a family on this team, and families take care of each other."

It was policy at the school to provide counselling for students during such times, but Coach Harrison also wanted to use the moment to discuss something else.

"In suicide prevention, it's common for those at risk to develop safety plans," he said. "A safety plan can be used in times of emergency, to help someone see that they're stronger than they realize and have more to live for than they think they do. Sometimes a safety plan can make the difference in helping someone thinking about suicide to get through one more day."

The players looked at each other with curiosity and a little confusion, but paid attention as Coach Harrison began writing on the white board.

"Guys, research has shown that those who are impacted by suicide—and that means all of us in this room—can become vulnerable to suicidal thoughts themselves down the line. And because of that, I want us all to take some time and work on our own safety plans. We don't need to wait until we are in crisis to do it. In fact, it can be better to work on a safety plan when our thoughts are clear and we are better able to focus on the key components: Natural Supports, Coping Strategies, Personal Strengths, and Past Experiences." He wrote these items down on the white board.

"I want everyone to take the rest of the week to work on these. Work on them with your friends, your teammates, your family. You can work on them together, or with me if you want. But it's important, especially during such a sad time like this. Not only can we be there for each other but we can begin taking steps to make sure we're all safe."

He watched as the players began to scribble down the headings in their notebooks. A few, as expected, did not seem very much into the exercise, but he nodded with pride as he watched others begin to immediately start conversations. A couple of hands were raised. Coach Harrison smiled at his team.

"OK," he said. "Who wants to do some examples?"





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# **SAFETY PLAN**

## **WHAT ARE MY WARNING SIGNS?**

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## **HEALTHY ACTIVITIES I CAN ENGAGE IN:**

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## **MY CIRCLE OF HELP:**

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## **HOW DO I LIKE TO BE SUPPORTED?**

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## **WHAT ARE MY STRENGTHS?**

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## **MY REASONS TO LIVE:**

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# DAILY AFFIRMATIONS

TODAY, I WILL DO MY BEST

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I deserve to  
be loved,  
and love  
others

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EMBRACING LIFE

I accept  
myself for  
who I am

I don't have to  
give up my hopes  
and dreams

EMBRACING LIFE



I am proud  
of myself  
and will  
continue to  
strive to do  
well

EMBRACING LIFE

I know my worth.

EMBRACING LIFE



*I LOVE MY BODY, MY  
MIND, MY DREAMS,  
AND MY GOALS*

EMBRACING LIFE





# **THANK YOU**



**THE YOUTH VOICE PROJECT AND THIS TOOL KIT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT CONTRIBUTIONS FROM AND COLLABORATION WITH A NUMBER OF PEOPLE AND AGENCIES. EMBRACING LIFE WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OF THE YOUTH WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS PROJECT. A VERY SPECIAL THANK YOU TO ELDER RON RATTE FOR HIS GUIDANCE ON THE SEVEN GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS, AND PIKAEA GROVES, A NORTHERN YOUTH WHO CONTRIBUTED SIGNIFICANTLY TO THE CREATION OF THIS BOOKLET.**

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**Roots of Hope**  
A Community Suicide Prevention Project  
<https://rootsofhope.ca>

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