

Extension's Youth Mental Health Reference Guide

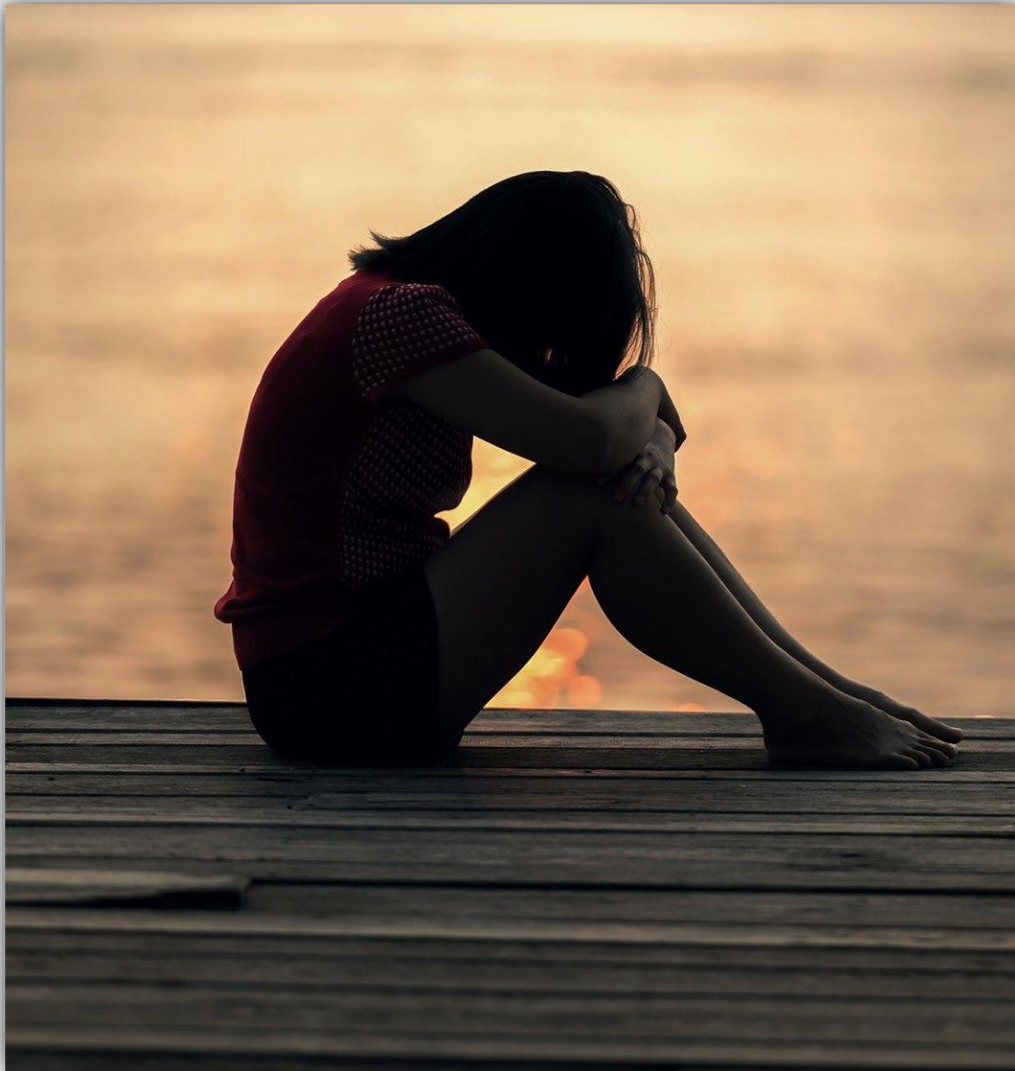
*FOR YOUTH PROGRAMMING
VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF*



Extension

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Extension's Youth Mental Health Reference Guide



Youth need Extension volunteers and employees who recognize and support them if they experience a mental health challenge. This document can help. Youth may experience emotional distress in the face of life's challenges. They may feel alone or hopeless. Those feelings can make it hard to function in healthy ways. This could lead to serious consequences.

Refer to this document if a youth shows signs or symptoms of a mental health challenge. This guide helps adults respond in a safe and supportive way.

Information in this Guide was adapted from the Michigan State University Extension Green Wellness Folder, which was based on a resource originally developed by the Michigan State University Behavioral Threat Assessment Team.

Trust, Belonging, and Communication

Create a Safe and Welcoming Experience

When young people feel safe in an experience, it supports learning and development. Youth need both physical and psychological safety. So, build trust. Create a sense of belonging. Practice **trauma-informed care**. Communicate with young people. These practices are the foundation of a safe and welcoming experience.

Build Trust

Young people feel safer with adults they trust. Use these practices:

- **Physical and psychological safety:** Act in a way that keeps a space free from the threat of bodily harm, mental/emotional distress, or bullying. Encourage participants to do the same.
- **Welcoming environment:** Celebrate diversity. Model a calm, friendly attitude.
- **Consistency, predictability:** Limit surprises.
- **Non-shaming, non-blaming, non-violent:** Address inappropriate behavior in private. Use a nonaggressive approach. Encourage belonging and acceptance.
- **Clear explanations** about what is happening and why: Share agendas, objectives, plans, and reasons for program.

Create a Sense of Belonging

Give youth a chance to get to know each other and become part of the group. It builds belonging. A sense of belonging supports a youth's physical and mental health. It helps them manage stress. When youth feel connected, they usually cope better with difficulty. Healthy coping means tough situations have less of a physical or mental impact on them.

What is trauma-informed care?

Every person may have a history of trauma. It may play a role in a person's life, behavior, or thinking. Trauma-informed care recognizes that trauma symptoms may be present even if they are not visible. Understanding this, adults use care when they interact with all youth. The goal is to avoid doing more harm.

Communicate

Good communication shows support for youth and builds trust. Use these strategies.

- **Open Communication:** Open communication is an important building block for relationships. Youth are more likely to turn to adults they know and trust. Early in an experience, get to know youth. Encourage them to share thoughts and feelings. Respect their point of view. Avoid judgment. Later, open communication helps support youth in emotional distress or a mental health crisis.
- **Effective Listening:** Listening seems simple, but often is not. Pay attention. Ask questions. Show understanding. Avoid interrupting. Let youth share their whole story. Show trust. Control your own emotions. Praise youth for reaching out.
- **Asking Open-Ended Questions:** Open-ended questions help youth pause and reflect before they answer. These questions need more than a one-word answer. The best questions usually start with a what, how, or when. Avoid why questions that may feel judgmental.

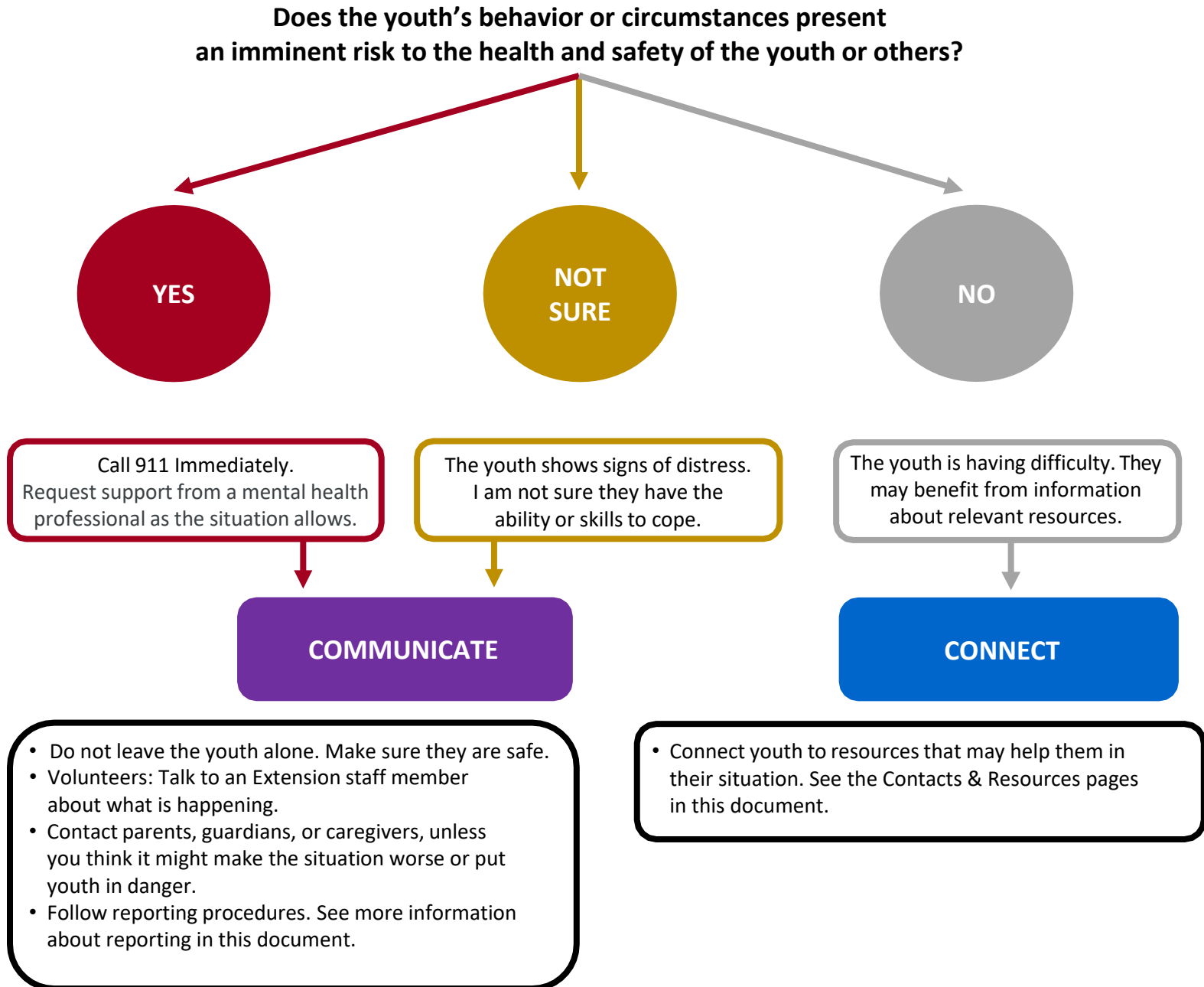
Indicators of Concern

This page shows examples of physical, emotional, and behavioral signs of distress in a youth. If you notice several of these signs, consider talking to the youth. Find another adult who can help. The more signs you see, the more reason there is for concern.

Do any of the topics on this page activate past experiences for you? Remember to take care of yourself too. Seek professional help if needed. It is easier to help others when you are well.

Physical	Emotional	Behavioral
Significant decline in hygiene or appearance	Self-disclosure of personal issues such as family problems or grief	Persistent disorderly or disruptive behavior
Lack of energy or extreme fatigue (e.g. sleeping in meetings or other events)	Extreme and consistent (more than two weeks) sad or depressed mood or feelings	Losing interest in things that used to be fun for reasons other than growing up
Noticeable unhealthy weight gain or loss	Difficulty controlling or balancing emotions	Threats or acts of violence to self or others
Visible self-inflicted or unexplained injuries (e.g. cuts, burns, bruises)	Increased signs of anxiety or panic attacks	Harassing or controlling behavior
Taking unnecessary risks or experimenting with drugs or alcohol	Loss of motivation, apathy, or trouble looking forward to the future	Destruction of property, theft, or vandalism
Unexplained stomach aches, nausea, or cramps	Family or relationship violence	Withdrawing from social settings or isolating from friends
Frequent headaches or unexplained aches and pains	Thoughts of suicide, self harm, or harming others	Irritability or snappy behavior beyond typical adolescent traits

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What Can I Do to Help a Young Person Who May be Experiencing a Crisis?

Follow these steps to help youth who may be experiencing a mental health challenge.

1. Talk with the Youth

- **Ask open-ended questions** to find out more. If the situation is severe, do not be afraid to ask, “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” or “Are you thinking about suicide?”
- **Be non-confrontational. Use a calm voice.** Reassure the youth. For example, say, “I am here for you” or “I want to help.”
- **Avoid minimizing** how they feel or what they are going through. Avoid saying things such as, “You’re probably just having a bad week,” or “Just calm down.”

2. Do No Further Harm

- **Treat all youth as if they have experienced challenges.** It is almost impossible to see trauma by just looking at someone. Avoid doing more harm. Treat everyone with care and respect. Learn more about being trauma-informed: <https://go.wisc.edu/542bwp>
- If the situation seems to be getting worse, **pause**. Re-evaluate what to say or do. For example, a touch to the shoulder may give comfort to some youth. For others, it may bring up memories of abuse.
- **Always ask permission** before having necessary physical contact with a youth or moving into their physical space.

3. Connect to Resources

- **Use the resources in this guide.** Print the Contact and Resources pages separately to share with youth, their parents, guardians, or caregivers. Keep copies of this [Care Card](https://go.wisc.edu/71ky3q) (<https://go.wisc.edu/71ky3q>) on hand for events.
- **You do not need to be a mental health professional to share helpful resources.**

4. Follow Up

- Next time you see the young person, ask how they are. Let them know you care.
- If you do not see or hear from them for a time, consider calling the youth and their family. If you are uncomfortable, talk to an Extension staff member about any concerns.

Should I Inform the Young Person’s Parents, Guardians, or Caregivers?

Most of the time, parents and guardians have a right to know what is going on with their children. They want to know. You may talk with parents or guardians about what you observe in a youth’s behavior. **Share concrete examples** to help explain the situation (see Indicators of Concern). **Avoid diagnosing an issue** (e.g., I think that your child is suffering from depression).

Other times, parents, guardians, or other family members may be the cause of the concern. Talk to Extension staff if you—

- Believe talking with the parents or guardians could put the youth in danger.
- Are uncomfortable contacting the parents or guardians.

When Should I Contact an Extension Staff Member?

Volunteers can talk with Extension staff members about a young person’s health and safety any time. If staff are on-site when a mental health challenge comes up, talk about the situation with them before talking to parents, guardians, or caregivers. Tell staff about any situation that falls under University reporting obligations, including injuries or close calls.

Reporting Procedures

In a mental health crisis, ask yourself:

Are the youth or others in *immediate* danger?

If yes, call 911.

Should I talk with parents or guardians?

Yes, unless you have reason to believe that the parent/guardian may be the cause of the concern.

Do I also need to make a report to the University?

If you file a report about a mental health challenge or crisis to professional or emergency services, you must also inform the University if any of the following applies:

- The incident occurred on a University of Wisconsin campus (or other University property),
- It occurred during an Extension activity, or
- It involves a University employee, volunteer, or contractor.

How to report to the University (or other needed groups):

- **Volunteers**—Contact the Extension Educator responsible for the program to make a report and get guidance about any other needed actions.
- **Extension Staff**—Inform the Area Extension Director and Regional Program Manager. They will provide support for making any required reports to the university.

Other Reporting Reminders

Child Abuse and Neglect

Extension staff and volunteers are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. If there is an emergency or a youth is in immediate danger, call 911.

In other situations where you have reasonable cause to believe that child abuse or neglect has occurred or will occur, contact the Child Protective Services (CPS) or local police department where the child resides by phone or in person.

Incidents at Extension activities or involving Extension volunteers, staff, or programs should also be reported to your Extension educator.

Injury & Incident Reporting:

Volunteers must also let Extension staff know anytime a situation occurs that poses a serious risk to program participants, volunteers, staff, or third parties hired by Extension. **This includes injuries that require medical attention, threats of serious harm to self or others, anything requiring intervention by police, liability concerns, close calls, property damage, and other high-risk situations.**

In these instances, volunteers must submit a Non-Employee Accident/Incident report to their local Extension staff. This report can be downloaded by Extension staff from <https://kb.wisc.edu/extension/95546>. Extension staff members can assist with completion of the report.

Contacts and Resources

EMERGENCY RESPONSE: DIAL 911

Wisconsin Resources

2-1-1 Wisconsin

Dial 2-1-1 or 1-877-947-2211

When you need help and don't know where to turn, 2-1-1 is a one-stop connection to local services. Find mental health resources, housing, food pantries, sexual assault hotlines, and more. Call or go to 2-1-1 online to search for resources: <https://211wisconsin.communityos.org/get-help>.

HOPELINE Text Line

Text "HOPELINE" to 741741

[HOPELINE](#) is Wisconsin's Emotional Support Text Line. It provides service throughout the state, 24/7. HOPELINE offers emotional support and resources before situations become crises.

988 Hopeline

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline provides free and confidential support for anyone experiencing a suicidal, mental health, and/or substance use crisis. People of all ages who need help for themselves or a loved one can call 988, text a message to 988 or use the chat feature at 988lifeline.org.

Mental Health America of Wisconsin

<http://www.mhawisconsin.org/statewide-resources-by-county.aspx>

This website includes a list of mental health resources in every county in Wisconsin.

End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin

<https://www.endabusewi.org/get-help/>

Find resources in each region of the state.

National & Urgent Response Resources (24 Hour Availability)

National Child Abuse Hotline

1-800-4-A-CHILD (422-4453)

The [Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline \(https://childhelphotline.org/\)](https://childhelphotline.org/) is available 24/7 with professional crisis counselors. Interpreters are available in over 170 languages. The hotline offers crisis intervention, information, and resource referrals. All calls, texts, and chats are confidential.

National Domestic Violence Hotline

Dial 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Text "START" to Dial 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

The [National Domestic Violence Hotline \(https://www.thehotline.org/\)](https://www.thehotline.org/) is available 24/7. Highly trained advocates offer essential tools and free, confidential support to help survivors of domestic violence. This includes crisis intervention information, education, and referral services in over 200 languages.

National Sexual Assault Hotline

Dial 1-800-656-HOPE

Reach the National Sexual Assault Hotline: 800-656-HOPE, online.rainn.org y rainn.org/es. The hotline connects with more than 1,000 local sexual assault service providers across the country.

Contacts and Resources

National & Urgent Response Resources (24 Hour Availability)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Dial 1-800-273-8255

The Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers. It provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. It is available 24/7. Find information for youth at <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/youth/>.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA)

Dial 1-800-662-4357

[SAMHSA's National Helpline \(https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline\)](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline) is available in English and Spanish for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. Services are confidential, free, and available every day, all day. This service helps with referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations. Callers can also order free publications and other information.

The Trevor Project

Dial 1-866-488-7386

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

The Trevor Project provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people under 25. Find resources for adults to help young people who are experiencing a crisis.

Additional National Resources

Al-Anon and Alateen

Dial 1-888-4AL-ANON

<https://al-anon.org/>

<https://al-anon.org/newcomers/teen-corner-alateen/>

Al-Anon is a mutual support program for people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking. Alateen, like Al-Anon, is a fellowship of young people (mostly teenagers) whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking. Alateen is not a religious program. There are no fees to join.

National Center for Victims of Crime

<https://victimsofcrime.org/>

The Center advocates for victims' rights and trains professionals who work with victims. It is a trusted source of information on victims' issues. It works to advance victims' rights and help victims of crime rebuild their lives.

National Human Trafficking Hotline

<https://humantraffickinghotline.org/>

If you or someone you know needs help, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline toll-free hotline, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-888-373-7888 to speak with a specially trained Anti-Trafficking Hotline Advocate.

Contacts and Resources

Additional National Resources

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

<https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care>

The Network offers resources and training about trauma-informed care and other relevant topics in both English and Spanish. The goal is to change the course of children's lives by improving their care and moving scientific research into practice.

National Runaway Safeline

Dial 1-800-RUNAWAY

<https://www.1800runaway.org/concerned-adults>

<https://www.1800runaway.org/youth-teens/get-help#get-help-chat>

The Safeline helps youth and families in crisis. It is a national communications system for runaway and homeless youth. The service offers training and services to meet the needs of vulnerable youth. Resources are for teens and concerned adults.

Extension Training Opportunities

UW-Madison Division of Extension

<https://extension.wisc.edu/health/behavioralhealth/>

Extension offers more training about mental health. Offerings include:

- Youth Mental Health First Aid
- Mindfulness and stress management education
- Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR)—Contact the county office to see if QPR suicide intervention skills training is available in your area.

Resources for Extension Employees

Employee Assistance Office (EAO)

608-263-2987

eao@mailplus.wisc.edu

<https://hr.wisc.edu/employee-assistance-office/>

UW-Madison's EAO offers information about life transitions, physical or emotional health issues, and relationship challenges. With the EAO's help, employees develop skills they need to understand and cope with challenging issues. Services include:

- Personal counseling
- Workplace consultation
- Well-being coaching and training

LifeMatters

Dial 1-800-634-6433

<https://members2.mylifematters.com/portal/welcome/sso>

The EAO offers LifeMatters. It is free and confidential telephone access to professional counselors in support of employees' personal and work-related concerns. It is available statewide, 24/7. Employees can access 1–5 sessions:

- Counselor—for personal or work-related issues
- Management consultation—for workplace concerns

Office of Access, Inclusion, and Compliance (OAIC)

<https://blogs.extension.wisc.edu/oaic/>

Extension's OAIC offers information about:

- Accommodations
- Disability
- Building inclusivity
- Language access
- Anti-racism work

Your Self-Care Plan

Remember, giving help and support to a youth during a mental health challenge can take a lot of energy. Take care of yourself during this time. If you talk about the situation with others, maintain confidentiality. Avoid sharing any information that might identify the young person.

Write 3 ways you can practice self-care.

1.	
2.	
3.	

Write the names of 2-3 people you can talk to if you need help.

1.	
2.	
3.	



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