



MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TOOLKIT

BY YOUTH, FOR YOUTH.

**DEVELOPED BY THE GIRL UP MENTAL HEALTH AND
WELLNESS COMMITTEE**



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Youth-Led, Youth-Created.

This toolkit was created by members of **Girl Up's Mental Health & Wellness Advisory Committee**, a group of young people working to make mental health conversations more accessible and meaningful for young people.

We created this resource to make **Mental Health First Aid** more approachable, practical, and relevant to the realities of young people and the communities we are part of. It draws on our perspectives and experiences as young people, alongside **Mental Health First Aid** training and other mental health literacy resources.

We hope it gives young people the knowledge and confidence to listen, support, and connect their peers to help when they need it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to **Kate Keisel**, Founder of Cambium Clinical, whose Mental Health First Aid training helped inform the foundation of this toolkit and its approach to peer support.

We are also grateful to **Megan Masterson** for her guidance, thoughtful feedback, and support throughout the development and refinement of this resource.

We also thank **Girl Up** for creating the platform and space for young people to lead, learn, and build resources like this.

WHY THIS TOOLKIT EXISTS

Have you ever had a friend tell you they weren't okay, and suddenly wondered what to say next?

Maybe someone confided in you that they were feeling anxious, overwhelmed, or burnt out. Or you noticed someone becoming quieter than usual or pulling away from activities they once loved. You wanted to help, but you weren't sure how.

You're not alone.

Every day, young people support one another through life's challenges. As members of the Girl Up community, we listen, encourage, advocate, and care for one another. But while many of us want to help, few of us are taught how to respond when someone is struggling with their mental health.

That's why we created this toolkit.

Developed by the Girl Up **Mental Health & Wellness Advisory Committee**, with clinical review by mental health professional **Kate Keisel**, this resource introduces the basics of **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** and offers practical guidance for supporting peers with empathy, confidence, and care. It won't make you a mental health professional – and it isn't meant to. Instead, it will help you recognize when someone may need support, respond compassionately, and encourage them to connect with the help they deserve.

Because creating a better world starts with caring for the people in it.

WHO THIS TOOLKIT IS FOR

This toolkit was created for every member of the Girl Up community: whether you're a club member, club leader, youth advocate, volunteer, or simply someone who wants to better support the people around you.

You don't need any previous knowledge of mental health to use this resource. Whether you're learning how to check in on a friend, looking for ways to create a more supportive club environment, or exploring strategies to care for your own well-being, this toolkit is for you.

No matter where you are in the world, one thing remains true: kindness, empathy, and connection have the power to change lives. We hope this toolkit gives you the confidence to start conversations, offer support, and help build communities where everyone feels safe to ask for help.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Mental health conversations can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to have all the answers to make a difference.

This toolkit is designed to be a practical guide that you can return to whenever you need it.

Throughout the toolkit, you'll be introduced to the ALGEE Mental Health First Aid Action Plan: a simple, evidence-informed framework that can help you respond to someone who may be experiencing emotional distress. You'll also find practical scenarios, conversation tips, self-care strategies, and guidance on when and how to encourage someone to seek additional support.

You don't need to read this toolkit from beginning to end in one sitting. Feel free to explore the sections that are most relevant to you and revisit them whenever you need a refresher.

Most importantly, remember this:

You are not expected to fix someone's problems. Sometimes the most meaningful thing you can do is listen with compassion, remind someone they are not alone, and help them take the next step toward getting support.

SECTION 1:

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

What Is Mental Health First Aid?

When someone gets a physical injury, many of us know the basics of what to do until professional medical help is available. **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)** works in a similar way.

Mental Health First Aid is the initial support offered to someone who may be experiencing emotional distress, a worsening mental health challenge, or a mental health crisis. Its purpose is not to diagnose or treat a condition, but to provide compassionate support, reduce immediate distress, and encourage the person to access appropriate help if needed.

Mental Health First Aid is rooted in empathy, respect, and the understanding that everyone deserves to be listened to without judgment.

Why It Matters for Young People

Adolescence and young adulthood are exciting periods of growth, but they can also come with unique pressures. School, relationships, family responsibilities, identity, social media, financial concerns, and global events can all affect our mental well-being.

Because young people often turn to friends before they turn to adults or professionals, knowing how to respond with care can make a meaningful difference. A supportive conversation cannot replace professional care, but it can help someone feel seen, reduce feelings of isolation, and encourage them to seek the support they deserve.

The Role of Peer Support

Being a supportive friend doesn't mean having all the answers, it means being willing to show up with kindness, empathy, and respect.

Peer support can be as simple as checking in on a friend, listening without interrupting, encouraging them to reach out for help, or reminding them that they don't have to go through difficult moments alone.

At Girl Up, we believe strong communities are built when young people care for one another. Compassionate conversations can make asking for help feel safer and help create a culture where mental health is valued as much as physical help.

What Mental Health First Aid Is Not

Mental Health First Aid has an important purpose, but it also has important limits.

It is not **therapy**.

It is not **counselling**.

It is not **diagnosing mental health conditions**.

It is not **solving someone's problems**.

Instead, Mental Health First Aid is about recognizing when someone may be struggling, responding with empathy, offering reassurance, and helping connect them to appropriate support when needed.

Knowing your limits is part of supporting others, and taking care of your own well-being is just as important as supporting those around you.

Remember

You don't have to be a mental health expert to make a difference. Sometimes, simply listening without judgment can be the first step toward someone getting the help they need.

SECTION 2:

COMMON MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

Everyone experiences hard days, but sometimes what we're feeling goes deeper than a bad mood. This section offers brief overviews of some of the most common mental health challenges young people face, along with signs that someone (including you) may be struggling. Remember: these are general signs, not a diagnostic checklist. If someone shows a few of these signs, it doesn't automatically mean something is wrong, but it may be a good moment to check in.

Stress

Stress is the body and mind's natural response to pressure, whether that's schoolwork, family expectations, relationships, or a packed schedule. In small doses, stress can even be motivating. But when it becomes constant or overwhelming, it can affect sleep, focus, and mood.

Signs someone may be struggling:

- Feeling constantly on edge or overwhelmed
- Trouble sleeping or changes in appetite
- Irritability or difficulty concentrating
- Physical symptoms like headaches or stomachaches

Anxiety

Anxiety is more than everyday worry. It can show up as persistent fear, racing thoughts, or a sense of dread that doesn't go away even when there's no clear threat. Anxiety can affect how someone shows up in school, friendships, and everyday activities.

Signs someone may be struggling:

- Excessive worry that's hard to control
- Avoiding situations, people, or places out of fear
- Restlessness or difficulty relaxing
- Physical symptoms like a racing heart or shortness of breath

Depression

Depression is more than sadness. It's a persistent low mood that can affect energy, motivation, and interest in things someone once enjoyed. Depression can make even small tasks feel exhausting.

Signs someone may be struggling:

- Losing interest in activities they used to enjoy
- Low energy or feeling tired most of the time
- Withdrawing from friends or activities
- Feeling hopeless, worthless, or unusually irritable

Burnout

Burnout happens when stress builds up over time without enough rest or recovery. It's common among students juggling academics, extracurriculars, and advocacy work, and it can leave someone feeling depleted even when nothing "big" has happened.

Signs someone may be struggling:

- Feeling emotionally or physically drained
- Growing cynical or detached about things they used to care about
- Reduced motivation or sense of accomplishment
- Struggling to keep up with responsibilities that once felt manageable

Grief and Loss

Grief isn't limited to losing a loved one. It can also follow the loss of a friendship, a relationship, a sense of safety, a routine, an opportunity, or another significant change in your life. Grief looks different for everyone and doesn't move in a straight line.

Signs someone may be struggling:

- Waves of sadness, anger, or numbness
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Withdrawing from others or usual activities
- Physical symptoms like fatigue or changes in sleep

Loneliness

Loneliness isn't just about being alone. It's the feeling of being disconnected from others or lacking the meaningful connection you want. Someone can be surrounded by people and still feel deeply lonely. Loneliness can happen on its own or alongside other experiences, including depression or anxiety.

Signs someone may be struggling:

- Feeling disconnected even in social settings
- Pulling away from friends or group activities
- Expressing feeling "invisible" or misunderstood
- Spending significantly more time isolated than before



Did You Know?

According to the World Health Organization's 2025 Commission on Social Connection report, teenagers aged 13 to 17 report the highest rates of loneliness of any age group globally, at around one in five.

SECTION 3: THE ALGEE ACTION PLAN

The **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) ALGEE Action Plan** gives us a clear, step-by-step way to respond when someone might be in emotional distress. You won't always move through the steps in order, and you won't always need all five. Think of ALGEE less as a script and more as a set of checkpoints you can return to in any supportive conversation.

Assess For Safety and Harm
Listen Actively & Without Judgement
Give Reassurance, Support & Resources
Encourage Professional Help
Encourage Self-Care and Community Support



Assess For Safety and Harm

Before anything else, take a moment to gauge whether the situation is urgent. Most conversations won't involve immediate danger, but it's important to know the difference.

- ***Recognizing warning signs:*** Sudden withdrawal, talk of hopelessness or being a burden, giving away belongings, or a sudden shift from distress to unusual calm.
- ***When a situation may be urgent:*** If someone mentions wanting to hurt themselves or someone else, or if you have any reason to believe they are not safe right now.
- ***What to do if someone appears unsafe:*** Stay calm, do not leave them alone, and get a trusted adult involved immediately. **(See Section 5: Crisis Situations and Safety for detailed guidance).**



Listen Actively & Without Judgement

Listening is often the most powerful thing you can offer. It doesn't require advice or solutions, just full attention.

- **Active listening:** Giving someone your full focus: putting your phone away, making eye contact, and reflecting back what you hear ("It sounds like you've been feeling really overwhelmed").
- **Empathy:** This means trying to understand how they feel without minimizing it or rushing to fix it.
- **Avoiding harmful responses:** This includes resisting the urge to compare their situation to your own, offer unsolicited advice too early, or change the subject when things feel heavy.

Helpful vs. Unhelpful Responses

Instead of...	Try...
"It could be worse."	"That sounds really hard."
"Just stay positive."	"I'm here, however you're feeling."
"Everyone goes through this."	"Your feelings make sense."
Changing the subject	"Tell me more, if you want to."



Give Reassurance, Support & Resources

Once someone feels heard, they often need to know they're not alone and that things can get better, without empty promises.

- ***Validating emotions:*** This means acknowledging that what someone is feeling is real and understandable, even if you don't fully understand their experience. Avoid immediately trying to fix the situation or telling them how they should feel. Simple responses like “That sounds really difficult” or “It makes sense that you're feeling this way” can help someone feel heard rather than judged.
- ***Challenging stigma:*** This means gently pushing back against shame, judgment, or negative beliefs about mental health. **Stigma** can make someone feel embarrassed, weak, “crazy,” or afraid to ask for help. It can also look like dismissing someone's feelings, telling them to “just get over it,” or treating mental health struggles as something to hide. You can challenge **stigma** by reminding them that needing support is not a weakness and that seeking help is a normal part of caring for your wellbeing.
- ***Offering hope without making promises:*** This includes avoiding guarantees like “everything will be fine” and instead offering steady reassurance like “you don't have to go through this alone.” You don't need to know exactly what will happen to remind someone that support is available.



Encourage Professional Help

Peer support matters, but some situations require specialized care. Your role is to help someone take the next step, not to take it for them.

- **Share possible support options:** Suggest a school counselor, therapist, trusted adult, mental health professional, or relevant hotline (see Resources section).
- **Offer to help them reach out:** Instead of simply telling them to get help, offer to help them find the right support or take that first step.



Encourage Self-Care and Community Support

- **Encourage healthy coping:** Support habits that promote wellbeing, such as getting enough rest, moving your body, journaling, or exploring creative activities.
- **Stay connected:** Encourage them to maintain supportive relationships and spend time with people they trust.
- **Build community:** Remind them of supportive spaces they can turn to, such as their Girl Up Club.

SECTION 4: CONVERSATION GUIDES

The scenarios below are drawn from real situations Girl Up members may encounter. Each one walks through what a supportive conversation can look like using the ALGEE framework: what to say, what to avoid saying, and which ALGEE steps are most relevant. These are examples, not scripts, so adapt the language to fit your own voice and the person in front of you.

A Friend Seems Withdrawn

A friend, worn down by years of political and economic instability, stops attending classes and club meetings. When you meet for coffee, they say, "Nothing will ever change. There's no point in trying anymore."

What to Say

- "When you say there's no point, do you mean you're feeling tired and discouraged, or like you don't want to keep going?" (If something feels off, ask directly: 'Are you having thoughts of hurting yourself?')
- "That makes sense, given everything going on, it's understandable to feel overwhelmed."
- "I'm not trying to fix this; I just want to understand how you're doing."
- "What kind of support would feel safe right now? I can help you take the first step."

What Not to Say

- *Debating whether change is possible, or whose political take is "right."*
- *Promising the situation will get better soon.*
- *"Just stop thinking about politics," or otherwise minimizing what they're feeling.*
- *Pushing them toward professional help before you've actually listened.*

Which ALGEE Steps Apply

- **Assess:** Gently probe what "no point in trying" means, and ask directly about self-harm if your gut says something isn't right; if they seem unsafe, stay with them and loop in a trusted adult.
- **Listen:** Give full attention, reflect back what you hear, and avoid debating politics or minimizing their emotions.
- **Give reassurance:** Validate that their reaction makes sense given the circumstances, without making unrealistic promises.
- **Encourage professional help:** Ask what kind of support would feel safe (such as campus counseling) and offer to help them take the first step.
- **Encourage self-care and community:** Suggest sleep, food, and daily structure, along with grounding techniques and staying connected to trusted people.

A Club Member Is Burned Out

One of your club's most dedicated members has spent months leading a campaign, organizing events, recruiting volunteers, and showing up for every meeting. Lately, they've been missing meetings, seem exhausted whenever they do show up, and snap, "What's even the point of doing this? Nothing ever changes anyway."

What to Say

- “You seem really drained lately. How are you actually doing?”
- “It’s okay to need a break. Rest is part of sustainable advocacy, not a failure to care.”
- “What would help right now: stepping back, sharing a task, or something else?”

What Not to Say

- “We really need you. Can you just push through this one event?”
- Guilt-tripping them about letting the team or cause down.
- Assuming burnout means they no longer care.
- Adding more tasks to “distract” them from how they feel.

Which ALGEE Steps Apply

- **Listen:** Give space for them to vent about exhaustion and cynicism without jumping in to defend the club or the cause.
- **Give reassurance:** Normalize burnout as a common response to sustained activism, not a personal failing.
- **Encourage self-care and community:** Talk through rest, delegating responsibilities, and setting boundaries.

Someone Shares They Are Struggling

A club member pulls you aside after a meeting and says, “I've been struggling lately. I don't really know why, I just haven't felt like myself.” They seem unsure about opening up.

What to Say

- "Thank you for telling me. I'm here if you want to share more."
- "That sounds really hard. How long have you been feeling this way?"
- "Have you thought about talking to someone, like a school counselor? I'd be glad to help you find one if that would be useful."

What Not to Say

- "You seem fine to me."
- Trying to diagnose or label what they're going through.
- "Everybody struggles sometimes," as a way to end the conversation.

Which ALGEE Steps Apply

- **Listen:** The core of this conversation; give full attention and let them set the pace.
- **Assess:** Gently gauge how serious things feel, without pressing for details they haven't offered.
- **Give reassurance:** Validate that it's okay to not feel okay, without over promising.
- **Encourage professional help:** If it feels appropriate, introduce a counselor or trusted adult as one option among others.

Someone Discloses a Mental Health Condition

A club member tells you they were recently diagnosed with anxiety, and that it's been affecting how much they can commit to right now. They seem unsure about how you'll react.

What to Say

- "Thank you for trusting me with that."
- "How can I best support you around club meetings and events?"
- "Are you currently connected to any support, like a therapist or doctor? Is there anything that would make things easier for you here? No pressure either way."

What Not to Say

- Treating them differently or acting as though they're suddenly fragile.
- "I totally know how you feel," or comparing their experience to your own unrelated experience.
- Giving unsolicited advice about their treatment, medication, or diagnosis.
- Sharing what they told you with other club members without their permission.

Which ALGEE Steps Apply

- Give reassurance: Normalize their experience and gently push back against any stigma they seem to carry.
- Encourage professional help: Ask about their existing support system rather than trying to replace it.
- Encourage self-care and community: Think together about small, concrete accommodations.

SECTION 5: CRISIS SITUATIONS AND SAFETY

When Immediate Support Is Needed

Some situations go beyond what peer support alone can safely handle. This doesn't mean you've failed as a friend. It means the situation calls for a trusted adult or professional, right away. This section will help you recognize those moments and know what to do.

If you are ever unsure whether a situation is a crisis, treat it as one. It is always better to get an adult involved and be wrong than to stay silent and be wrong.

Suicidal Thoughts (Suicidal Ideation)

What it might look like: Someone may talk about wanting to die or not wanting to exist anymore, express feeling like a burden to others, or say there's no way out of their situation. They may also give away belongings, say goodbye in ways that feel final, or show a sudden calm after a period of visible distress.

What to do:

- Take it seriously, always. Never assume someone is exaggerating or seeking attention.
- Ask directly and calmly whether they are thinking about suicide. Asking does not plant the idea; it opens the door for honesty.
- Stay with them, or make sure they are not left alone, while you get an adult involved.

- Immediately tell a trusted adult, counselor, or contact a crisis line (see Resources).

What to avoid:

- Promising to keep it a secret. This is one situation where confidentiality must come second to safety.
- Trying to handle it alone or waiting to see if it passes.

Self-Harm Concerns

What it might look like: Someone may show unexplained injuries, wear clothing that seems out of place for the weather to cover marks, or make comments about hurting themselves or feeling numb.

What to do:

- Respond with compassion, not shock or judgment. Self-harm is often a way of coping with overwhelming emotions, not a bid for attention.
- Let them know you care about them and are concerned.
- Encourage and help them connect with a trusted adult or mental health professional.

What to avoid:

- Reacting with anger, disgust, or ultimatums.
- Asking for graphic details about how or how often.

Abuse Disclosures

What it might look like: Someone may disclose that they are being physically, emotionally, or sexually harmed by someone in their life, including a family member, partner, or someone in a position of trust.

What to do:

- Listen without interrupting or reacting with visible shock.
- Believe them. Disclosures of abuse are rarely made lightly.
- Let them know it is not their fault.
- Report to a trusted adult, school counselor, or appropriate authority as soon as possible, even if they ask you not to.

What to avoid:

- *Promising secrecy. Abuse disclosures, like suicidal thoughts, require involving an adult even if it feels like breaking trust.*
- *Confronting the person they've disclosed about on your own.*

Panic Attacks

What it might look like: Someone may experience a sudden onset of intense fear, a racing heart, difficulty breathing, dizziness, or a feeling of losing control, even without a clear external trigger.

What to do:

- Stay calm yourself. Your steadiness helps regulate theirs.
- Speak in a slow, reassuring voice and remind them that panic attacks, while frightening, do pass.
- Help ground them: encourage slow breathing, and gently guide their attention to their surroundings (what they can see, hear, or touch).
- Ask if they want you to stay with them or get someone else.

What to avoid:

- Telling them to "just calm down" or minimizing what they're feeling.
- Crowding them if they need space to breathe.

Remember

In any of these situations, your role is not to solve the crisis. It's to stay calm, stay present, and get the right support involved quickly. Confidentiality matters in everyday conversations, but it always comes second to someone's safety.

For crisis line numbers and additional resources, see the Resources section of this toolkit.

SECTION 6: MENTAL HEALTH DURING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UNCERTAINTY

Caring for Yourself During Political Turmoil

If the state of the world has felt heavy lately, you're not imagining it, and you're not alone in feeling it.

Political and social unrest doesn't just make headlines. It can shape how we think, how we feel, and how we move through our daily lives. Increased stressors during times of political and social uncertainty can take a real toll on young people's mental health, showing up as anxiety, exhaustion, anger, or a quiet sense of helplessness, even for those who are not directly affected by the events themselves.

The same skills you've learned throughout this toolkit still matter here. Listening without judgment, offering reassurance, and encouraging healthy coping can help you support yourself and those around you during difficult times. Mental Health First Aid can help you navigate these moments with greater care, compassion, and resilience.

Managing Information Overload

It's okay to care deeply about what's happening in the world and still need to look away sometimes. Constant exposure to distressing news can wear on you just as much as the events themselves.

- **Limit doom scrolling.** Give yourself permission to set boundaries around how much news you take in, especially late at night or first thing in the morning.
- **Choose reliable sources.** It is okay to stick to a few trusted outlets rather than absorbing every feed or forwarded message that comes your way.
- **Set time limits for consuming news.** Carve out specific windows to catch up on current events instead of letting the news sit in the background of your entire day.

Balancing Activism and Wellbeing

Caring about change doesn't mean you have to carry every crisis alone.

- You do not need to respond to every crisis immediately. It is okay to pause.
- Rest is part of sustainable advocacy. It is not a break from the work or a betrayal of the cause.
- Build self-care into your everyday routine, not just when you are already running on empty. Looking after yourself helps you keep showing up for the causes that matter most, for the long term.

Staying Connected

Hard moments feel heavier in isolation. Staying connected to others is one of the kindest things you can do for yourself during challenging times.

- **Community care.** Check in on the people around you, and allow them to check in on you too.

- **Peer support.** Lean on people who understand what you're carrying, including members of your Girl Up community and other trusted people in your life.

Recognizing Activist Burnout

Burnout does not happen overnight. It often builds gradually when we spend long periods caring for others while neglecting our own needs.

You might be experiencing activist burnout if you notice:

- Constant exhaustion, even after resting.
- Feeling emotionally numb or disconnected.
- Becoming cynical or losing hope.
- Feeling guilty whenever you take a break.
- Losing motivation for work or causes you once cared deeply about.

These feelings do not mean you have failed. They may simply be signs that it is time to pause, recharge, and seek support.

SECTION 7: CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER

Supporting others is meaningful work, but it can also be emotionally demanding. Whether you're checking in on a friend, leading your Girl Up Club, or simply being the person others turn to, it's important to remember that your well-being matters too.

Caring for yourself is not separate from caring for others. It is what allows you to keep showing up with compassion, empathy, and resilience.

Emotional Boundaries

Caring about someone does not mean carrying everything they are carrying.

Healthy emotional boundaries help you support others without losing yourself in the process. They might look like continuing a conversation tomorrow instead of at midnight, being honest when you do not have the emotional capacity for a heavy conversation, or recognizing when a situation is beyond what you can handle alone.

Having boundaries does not make you less kind or less supportive. In fact, boundaries help you care for others in a way that is healthy and sustainable.

Compassion Fatigue

Supporting people through difficult moments can take an emotional toll over time.

If you've been caring for others for a while, you may begin to feel emotionally drained, disconnected, or less able to respond with the same energy and empathy you once had. This is known as compassion fatigue, and it is a natural response to prolonged caregiving. It does not mean you have stopped caring.

Recognizing these signs early gives you the opportunity to rest, reset, and seek support before emotional exhaustion becomes overwhelming.

Some common signs include:

- Feeling emotionally drained.
- Becoming easily irritated or overwhelmed.
- Feeling detached or numb.
- Losing motivation to support others.
- Feeling guilty for needing a break.

Prioritize Self-Care

Self-care is not a reward you earn after giving enough to everyone else. It is part of what makes caring for others possible in the first place.

Self-care looks different for everyone. It might mean getting enough sleep, moving your body, spending time with people who restore your energy, enjoying a hobby, praying or reflecting, or simply taking a quiet moment where no one needs anything from you.

Small, consistent acts of self-care often have a greater impact than waiting until you are completely exhausted.

Know Your Limits

You are one person, and you were never meant to carry everything alone.

Knowing your limits means being honest about what you can realistically take on and accepting that you cannot solve every problem.

Sometimes, supporting someone means saying:

- "I want to be here for you, but I think we should involve someone who can help."
- "I'm not in the right headspace to have this conversation right now. Can we talk tomorrow?"
- "I care about you, and I want to make sure you get the support you deserve."

Asking for help or stepping back when needed is not a sign of failure. It is part of caring responsibly.

When to Seek Support Yourself

The people who support others also need support.

If you notice yourself feeling persistently exhausted, hopeless, anxious, resentful, emotionally disconnected, or overwhelmed, it may be time to reach out to someone you trust.

That could be:

- A trusted adult.
- A mentor.
- A school or university counselor.
- A therapist or other mental health professional.
- A close friend or family member.

You do not have to wait until you are at breaking point before asking for help. Looking after your own mental health is one of the most important things you can do for yourself and for the people who rely on you.

Remember

You cannot pour from an empty cup. The care you so freely give to others is something you deserve, too.

SECTION 8:

BUILDING MENTALLY HEALTHY GIRL UP COMMUNITIES

A mentally healthy community is not one where no one struggles. It is one where people feel safe asking for help, know they will be treated with kindness, and understand that they do not have to face challenges alone.

As Girl Up members and leaders, we have the opportunity to create spaces where well-being is just as important as achievement. Building that kind of culture does not require special qualifications. It starts with intentional habits, meaningful conversations, and genuine care for one another.

Wellness Check-Ins

A simple check-in can help members feel seen before diving into the agenda.

Try asking questions like:

- "How are you arriving today?"
- "Share one word that describes how you're feeling."
- "What's one thing you're looking forward to this week?"

Keep participation optional. Some members may prefer to listen rather than share, and that's okay.

Supportive Meeting Norms

Agree on a few shared expectations that help everyone feel respected and included.

Consider norms such as:

- Listen without interrupting.
- Respect confidentiality within the limits of safety.
- Avoid judgment or dismissive comments.
- Give everyone an opportunity to contribute.
- Respect different experiences and perspectives.

When members help create these norms, they are more likely to uphold them.

Mental Health Campaigns

Mental health does not have to be limited to one awareness day each year.

Your club could:

- Host a self-care or stress management workshop.
- Organize peer support or wellness activities during exam periods.
- Share trusted mental health resources through newsletters or social media.
- Partner with local organizations to raise awareness in your community.

Even small conversations can help reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking.

Inclusive Language

The words we use shape the kind of community we create.

Instead of making assumptions about someone's experience, choose language that is respectful, compassionate, and person-centered.

Be mindful of words like “crazy” or “insane” when describing people, emotions, or situations. Although these terms are often used casually, they can reinforce harmful stereotypes about people experiencing mental health challenges. Where possible, choose words that describe what you actually mean without stigmatizing mental health conditions.

For example:

Instead of...	Try saying...
"You're being dramatic."	"That sounds really difficult."
"Just calm down."	"I'm here for you. Do you want to talk about what's going on?"
"Everyone feels stressed."	"Thank you for sharing how you're feeling."
"What's wrong with you?"	"How can I support you right now?"

Remember

*A mentally healthy club isn't one where nobody ever struggles.
It's one where struggling doesn't mean facing it alone.*

QUICK REFERENCE SHEET

ALGEE: The Mental Health First Aid Action Plan

A — Assess for safety and risk of harm

L — Listen actively, without judgement

G — Give reassurance, support, and resources

E — Encourage professional help (counselors, therapists, hotlines)

E — Encourage self-care and community support

In a crisis, don't wait: get a trusted adult involved right away.

See the Resources page for hotline numbers.

RESOURCES

Global and Multi Country Resources

Find A Helpline (Global)

A directory of verified, free helplines covering over 175 countries and 21 topics (suicide, anxiety, depression, domestic violence, and more). This is the best starting point for a club member anywhere in the world looking for a local, up to date number.

Befrienders Worldwide (Global)

A global network of about 349 emotional support centers across 32 countries. Volunteers offer confidential, judgment free listening to anyone in distress, not only those in suicidal crisis. The site has a helpline finder by country.

International Association for Suicide Prevention (Global)

A global organization connecting suicide prevention professionals and crisis centers in dozens of countries. Their site includes a directory of crisis centers by region.

World Health Organization, Mental Health (Global)

General information on mental health, mental health conditions, global statistics, WHO initiatives, fact sheets, and related resources. Useful for background information and evidence-based mental health education.

Crisis Support

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (US)

Call or text 988, available 24/7, free and confidential.

Crisis Text Line (US and select countries)

Text HOME to 741741 (US), available 24/7, free and confidential.
Also reachable via WhatsApp and online chat.

The Trevor Project (US + select international services)

Call 1 866 488 7386 or text START to 678 678, available 24/7, free and confidential. Also offers TrevorSpace, a moderated online peer community open internationally to ages 13 to 24.

Specialized Support

NAMI HelpLine (National Alliance on Mental Illness) (US)

Call 1 800 950 6264 or text NAMI to 62640, Monday through Friday, 10 am to 10 pm ET. Provides mental health information, resource referrals, and peer support. This is not a crisis line; NAMI directs anyone in crisis to 988.

National Alliance for Eating Disorders (US)

Call 866 662 1235, Monday through Friday, 9 am to 7 pm EST. Confidential helpline staffed by licensed therapists specializing in eating disorders, offering referrals to treatment at all levels of care.

A Note on Local Numbers

Crisis line numbers and even entire organizations can change without much notice (numbers get discontinued, services merge, funding shifts). Rather than list country specific hotlines here that could go stale, we recommend each club look up their own country's current listings at findahelpline.com and record them in the section below.

Local Club Contacts

Use this space to add resources specific to your school, city, or country:

- Campus or school counseling center: _____
- Local crisis line or hospital: _____
- Trusted local mental health organization: _____
- Trusted adult contacts (advisor, counselor, etc.): _____

Insider's Info

- Looking for support in your country? Start with **Find A Helpline** to search for available services by country and type of support.
- Prefer listening or talking online? **Befrienders Worldwide** offers confidential emotional support through centres around the world.
- Looking to learn more about mental health? The **World Health Organization** is a useful starting point for reliable, evidence-based information.

APPENDIX: SOURCES & REFERENCES

Sections 1–2 — Understanding MHFA / Common Mental Health Challenges

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)** — General definitions and information on stress, burnout, and mental health symptoms.
- **Mind (UK)** and **YoungMinds (UK)** — Youth-focused guidance on stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, and related signs and experiences.
- **World Health Organization (WHO)** — Mental health resources and the Commission on Social Connection report, cited directly in Section 2.

Section 3 — The ALGEE Action Plan

ALGEE is the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Action Plan, developed by Betty Kitchener and Anthony Jorm and introduced through Mental Health First Aid Australia in 2000. It is now used internationally through MHFA programs, including the National Council for Mental Wellbeing’s MHFA program. The Girl Up Mental Health & Wellness Advisory Committee learned this framework through training led by Kate Keisel, Founder of Cambium Clinical, and adapted the wording and examples for a youth peer-support context.

Section 4 — Conversation Guides

Adapted from general MHFA “helpful vs. unhelpful response” approaches and cross-referenced with NAMI and Mind’s peer-support communication guidance.

Section 5 — Crisis Situations and Safety

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and NAMI** — Guidance on responding to suicidal ideation, self-harm disclosures, and panic attacks.
- General safeguarding principles for abuse disclosures used across youth-serving organizations

Section 6 — Mental Health During Political and Social Uncertainty

Amnesty International, “Caring for You So You Can Care for Others” — Activist burnout and compassion fatigue guidance, which informed the “Balancing Activism and Wellbeing” content.

Section 7 — Caring for the Caregiver

Compassion fatigue, drawing on the work of Dr. Charles Figley, alongside general guidance from NAMI and caregiver-support literature.

Section 8 — Building Mentally Healthy Girl Up Communities

Compiled by the committee from general best practices in peer-support group facilitation, inclusive-language guidance, and youth mental health literacy materials.

General Note

This toolkit is an educational resource compiled and adapted by the **Girl Up Mental Health & Wellness Advisory Committee** from publicly available mental health literacy sources and MHFA training. It is not a substitute for professional or clinical guidance.

**FOR EVERY GIRL WHO NEEDS THIS
REMINDER: YOU ARE SEEN, YOU ARE
WORTHY, AND YOU ARE NEVER ALONE.**

**WITH LOVE, AND GRATITUDE TO GIRL UP
FOR GIVING GIRLS A SPACE TO LEARN, LEAD,
AND BE HEARD.**