



SCOUTING AND MENTAL HEALTH



A brief introduction



Scouting provides a “**social protection unit**” - like a family, a team, or a religious community.

A sense of belonging is highly correlated with mental health.

Especially valuable for youth who may have more difficulty fitting in. A few protective factors:

Positive role models.

Non-judgmental environment. Acceptance.

Everyone contributes.

Everyone can experience success based on their challenge level.

Promotes resilience - bouncebackability!

Clear path for achievement and success.

Altruism - giving back to others.

A place to belong



Learn skills that increase agency and self-confidence.

Access to nature. Unplug.

What else?

GOOD NEWS!

We already know this, but it's backed up by science!



One piece of research:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27834224>

dopamine

endorphin

oxytocin

serotonin



SCOUTING ACTIVITIES
CAN HELP ACTIVATE
OUR BRAINS NATURAL
HAPPINESS CHEMISTRY

Unleash your natural brain chemistry Scouting taps into all of these!

Serotonin - feeling happy, stable, content. Stabilizes mood/anxiety. Eat well. Sunlight. Time outside. Get out into nature. Mindfulness. Physical activity. Sleep.

Endorphins - Natural painkiller, helps with stress management. Laughter, singing, dancing, listen to music, skits, exercise, physical activity.

Dopamine - Happiness, feeling rewarded, sense of achievement. Getting the right amount of sleep, being kind to yourself and others, exercise, attainable challenges, team work, complete a task, make something, cook a meal. Recognition and rank advancement.

Oxytocin - the “bonding” hormone, belonging, comfort, connection, trust. Shared challenges. playing with a pet, spend time with friends, do something nice for someone. Patrol cheer. Troop identity. Think Wood Badge activities!

Brief overview of depression & anxiety in youth



Emotional ups and downs are a normal part of adolescence. However, depression can be a serious mental health concern.

Depression is on the rise in youth.

What is making our youth depressed?

Social media - can promote bullying, comparison, shame, rejection, body distortion, mistakes “live on”. (*Not all aspects of social media are bad)

Academic pressures - grades, college, perfectionism, comparison

Bullying or teasing in school.

Racism, homophobia.

Isolation. Not “fitting in”.

Loss - can be from moving, or a friend moves away, death of loved one or pet.

Rejection - “heart break”.

Trauma, abuse.

Disconnect with nature/outdoors.

Reduced distress tolerance skills - reduced resiliency.



Signs and symptoms of Major Depression

- Persistent change in mood and behaviors for most of the day (usually at least 2 weeks)
- Teens can have moments when they “look happy”.
- Does not have to be all of the following, but any one of these is worth a check-in
- **Any reference to suicide needs to be taken seriously. Parents/guardians must know.**

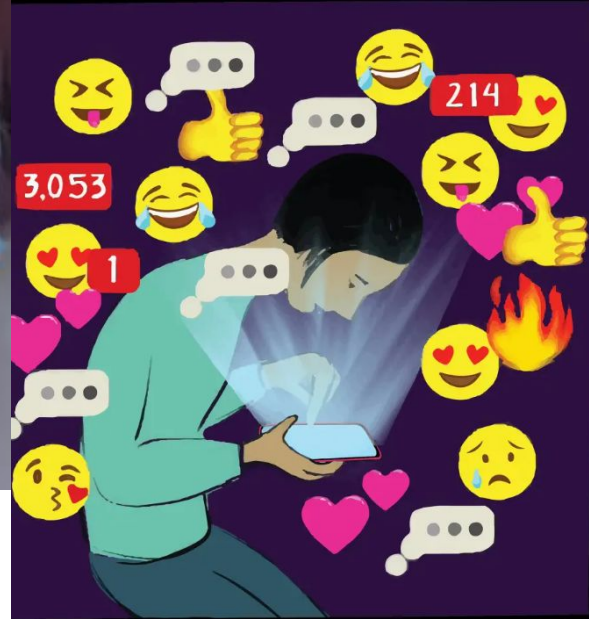
Emotional Changes - What are they expressing (or not!)

- Irritable. Expressing frustration or anger even over small things.
- Frequent crying, tearfulness. Frequent sighing.
- Fixated on past failures (perceived or actual). Low self worth.
- Sensitive to rejection. Need extra reassurances.
- Loss of interest in activities they used to enjoy.
- Expressing that life is bleak or pointless. Have nothing to look forward to.
- Talking about death or dying. Statements such as , “no one would miss me”.
- Talking about suicide. Reading about suicide. Saying they have a plan. **Any talk of self harm has to be taken seriously.**

Behavioral - what you're noticing, what's changed?

- Withdrawing from friends. Isolating.
- Excessive increased time gaming, on social media.
- Not caring about pets, belongings
- Slowed speech or movements.
- Saying "I don't know" to all questions.
- Changes at school. Grades drop. School avoidance
- Less attention to hygiene or appearance
- Insomnia, can't get to sleep. Or, sleeping too much.
- More aches and pains, headaches without a clear cause.
- Change in eating habits.
- Use of alcohol or drugs
- Difficulty making decisions, remembering things.
- Giving away possessions that are important to them.

ANXIETY



Anxiety

Anxiety is a cognitive and emotional response to perceived danger or learned fear. It can be experienced like fear, but it tends to be much more prolonged. Can trigger physical responses. Catastrophic thoughts increase anxiety. Physical responses are uncomfortable and intensify the anxiety.

Avoidance often further reinforces anxiety.

Thoughts:

What if....	In every situation: always, never, very...
Worse case	Stuck spirals of thinking (perseverating)
I can't stand it	Time travel (regret about the past, worry about the future)

Physical: increased heart rate, sweating, rapid breathing, tightness in throat, feel dizzy, nauseous. Can't sleep/eat. Avoidance.

Anxiety manifests in different ways. Some anxiety is good (e.g. gets us to plan ahead). As a more serious condition it can present in different ways.

WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

Worrying about almost everything. Low threshold for new experiences. Catastrophic thinking. Worry and rumination about past and future events.

Worrying about embarrassing yourself in front of others. Worrying about being judged negatively. Feeling intensely uncomfortable in situations that require interacting with others.

Intense anxiety about being separated from a parent or caregiver. Worrying that something bad will happen to their parent. Difficulty self-soothing. Will over seek reassurance.

Fear that specific things will cause harm (e.g. spiders, bugs, dogs, lightening, heights, needles). Over estimate that something unpleasant or dangerous will happen. Overly focused on how they feeling. What if thinking. Worse case outcomes. Avoidance.

The anxiety is restricted to performing in public, such as public speaking, or a situation when the person is the sole object of public attention.

Repetitive or compulsive behaviors that a person feels compelled to do in order to prevent harm occurring. Behaviors are triggered by obsessive thoughts that harm will occur. Compulsions: ritualistic checking of stoves, door locks, hand washing, ordering, counting. Obsessions: harming a loved one, serious illness, serious accident.

Intense feelings of anxiety occurring in short, specific moments. Heart palpitations, rapid breathing, shaking, feeling faint. Intense fear of having another panic attack.

PTSD Occurs after the experience of a traumatic event (life threatening, extreme danger, violence, or prolonged abuse/neglect of self or others). Memories can be triggered by reminders (sounds, smells), memories may feel “real”, avoid associations.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder
Social Anxiety Disorder
Separation Anxiety Disorder
Specific Phobias
Performance Anxiety
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
Panic Disorder

Stress - external event(s). Anxiety - persistent worries.
Anxiety does not have to be a disorder to be unhealthy.
Nobody likes feeling anxious!
Unfortunately our reactions can reinforce it - either confirms their fears or increases avoidance.



<https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer/how-identify-anxiety-adolescents-and-talk-them>

Your role is **not** to be a therapist or mental health specialist.

YPT at all times. Two deep leadership.

Mandated reporters of abuse or neglect.

Most of the following suggestions are primarily for parents or guardians.

Responding to signs of depression & anxiety



Notice don't ignore.

Validate their feelings, don't judge, even if it seems disproportionate.

"I've noticed lately that you've seemed really down"

Be supportively curious about what might be bothering them.

Listen!

Don't minimize, "Oh that's nothing to worry about".

Don't jump to problem solving, "One way to fix that is to..."

Ask if they want help, "Would you like to some help figuring that out?"

Make empathic statements, "that sounds stressful", "I can see why that might make you feel sad or worried".

Listening without judgement will mean they are more likely to open up to you.

Don't express your frustration or disappointment.

Say "I'm worried about you" or "You don't have to deal with this by yourself".

Offer progressive successes. Build new experiences and "pathways". Opportunities to unlearn fear.

Always pass on concerns to parents or guardians

REMEMBER!

What we do to help any Scout be successful will probably help ALL Scouts be successful.

No need to single anyone out.

These interventions help build resiliency for all.

What else can Scout leaders do to promote mental health and well-being?

Find ways to incorporate mental well-being into activities. Have tasks/talks on morale, teamwork, communication, planning, stress management (especially for older Scouts). Psychological first aid. Build troop cohesion whenever possible.

Incremental exposure to what is uncomfortable. Don't throw in the deep end!

Hurdle help (EDGE method). Explain. Demonstrate. Guide. Enable.

Provide structure (yes it's Scout led, but they don't have fully formed frontal lobes!).

Achievable challenges. Overcoming adversity is good for mental health.

Encourage and acknowledge efforts. Praise effort not just outcomes.

Have age appropriate expectations

Everyone has a role - encourage participation but don't force it.

Be a positive role model.

How do **adults** handle stress, adversity, problems, etc...Take care of yourself!

Delegate - show Scouts that relying on each other is important.

Good communication skills. Don't assume. Use sarcasm carefully! QTIP.

Express gratitude, appreciation and thanks. Again, role modeling.


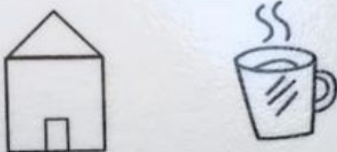


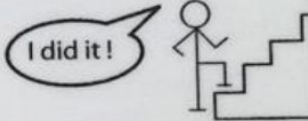


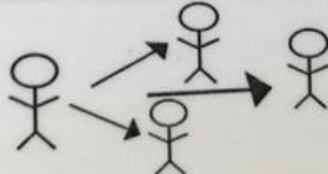
Use "I" statements. Use feelings words (it's OK!). "I feel frustrated", "I feel excited".

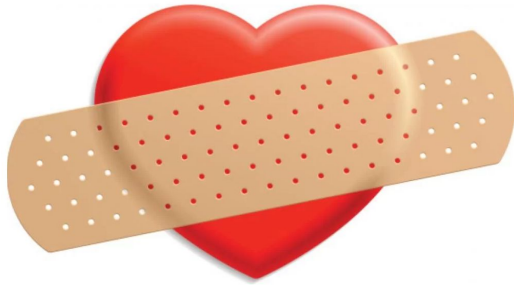
Welcome mistakes as learning opportunities.

Demonstrate mindfulness - especially in nature. Stop and smell the pine trees (and coffee!).

Psychological First Aid is an important skill to learn for dealing with a crisis situation. Scouts can learn basic support, listening, reassuring, calming and triage skills.

<https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/psychological-first-aid/>

 Contact and Engage	 Safety and Comfort	 Stabilization & Orientation
 Information Gathering	 Practical Assistance and Increased Self Reliance	 Connection and Social Support
 Coping Information	 Referral	Respect Limits: Both Yours and Others.



Getting to know your Scouts - Joining Meeting/Conference

We want our Scouts to have successful and positive experiences (that does not mean there won't be adversity - which is good!). It also does not mean adult leaders need to be mental health specialists!

Getting to know your Scouts is an important aspect of a successful experience for all.

Arrange a “Joining” meeting with new parents or guardians

- Not about “weeding out” Scouts.
- Private conversation.
- Parents decide what to disclose. Don't press for information, e.g. a diagnosis, family history, etc.
- Helps develop rapport and trust
- Focus on helping the Scout be successful
- Share that you have seen youth grow and thrive in Scouting.
- Ask about the best way to share communication, concerns, successes, etc.

Some Suggestions on what you might say during a Joining meeting

What is important for us to know about your child to help them have a great Scouting experience?

What are her/his strengths?

What might she/he find most difficult or challenging?

How does your child act when overwhelmed? What might we notice?

Does anything particular lead to more emotional or behavioral struggles?

Is there anything particular that helps your child be successful at home or in other settings?

What concerns do you have about your child joining our troop?

Is there anything currently happening in her/his life that might be helpful for us to be aware of?

Any questions about trips and overnight activities. What is important for us to know?

Scoutmaster conference

A place to check in with a Scout, not just about advancement.

Get on the same eye level. Don't stand over a Scout. Find a fairly quiet place, **but always YPT.**

Questions that communicate investment in the Scout.

“How you doing?”

“What's going well for you?”

“What's been more difficult lately?”

“What's something you've overcome lately?”

“What do you like about Scouting?” “What trips/activities are you looking forward too?”

“What would you like to be doing in Scouting?” “How are things going in your Patrol?”

“Do you have any suggestions for making troop meetings go well?”

End with something positive, encouragement, communicate a belief in the Scout.

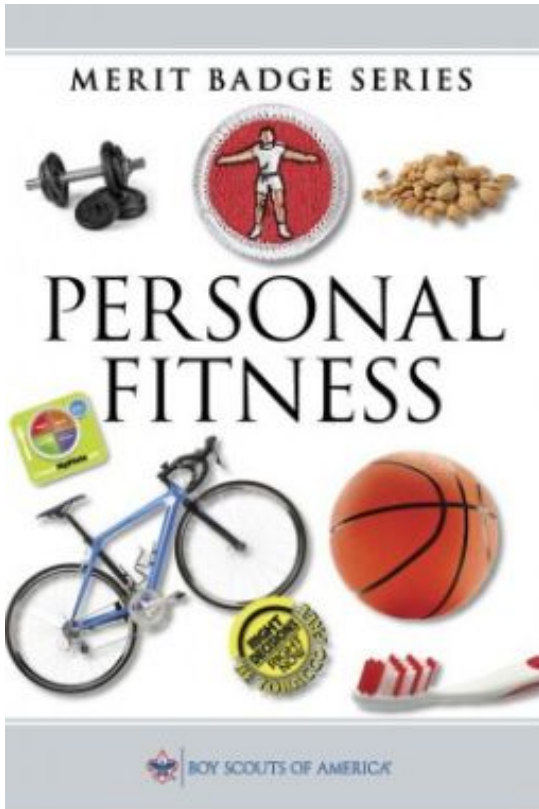
Scenario:

A new Scout has never been camping before. The parents let you know that their child tried to have an overnight at a friend's house, but needed to leave early as they were anxious. The parents tell you they are worried their son/daughter “will not like camping and not fit in well with the troop”.

The Scout is hearing about Camp Squanto and raises their hand when the troop is asked who is interested in attending this year. Their whole patrol is planning on going and is very enthusiastic!

How do we help this Scout be successful? How do we help all Scouts be successful!

DISCUSS



Great opportunity to discuss mental health and wellbeing:

What does personal fitness mean to you?

Four components:

mental, physical, social and spiritual

Mental Fitness section:

In the new book, pages 32-33 (not much!).

Something I do with Scouts:

Thumb ball activity:

Questions..



Thumb ball questions for mental health and well-being

Ask the question that is the number where your right thumb lands.

If you've already asked that question, go to your left thumb, or a color, etc.

1. One way to calm yourself when feeling anxious?
2. Demonstrate deep breathing that can help relax you.
3. Describe one way to be mindful in the moment?
4. Name five feeling words
5. Name your five senses. Name something you can hear....
6. Name an outdoor activity you enjoy, say why.
7. What is one way you can be kind to other Scouts?
8. What is a good amount of sleep time?
9. If you're afraid to try something new, what could someone say to encourage you?
10. If you see someone being bullied in school, what is one thing you can do?
11. Why is spending time outside good for you?
12. What is one thing you can do to welcome a new Scout
- Red. Name at least two signs that someone might be depressed
- Blue. What's an example of quality time with your family?
- White. Name something you are responsible for taking care of.
- Green. Name something you are grateful for and why.
- Yellow. Why are screens bad for getting to sleep?
- Black. I am happiest when....
- Pink. Demonstrate these feeling words: excited, angry, annoyed, proud
- Orange. If a friend tells you they are thinking of hurting themselves, what could you do?

Scout Oath

A troop activity can be taking a section from the oath and having a quick discussion and some activities..

....**MENTALLY AWAKE.** What does this mean??

Have a short discussion - what do Scouts think?

Sleep helps with being awake!

Do a mindfulness exercise

Do a grounding or breathing exercise

Do a activity with only non-verbal directions

Rose, bud and thorn exercise. Reflection. Camp/trip journal

Each Scout makes a mental health first aid card.

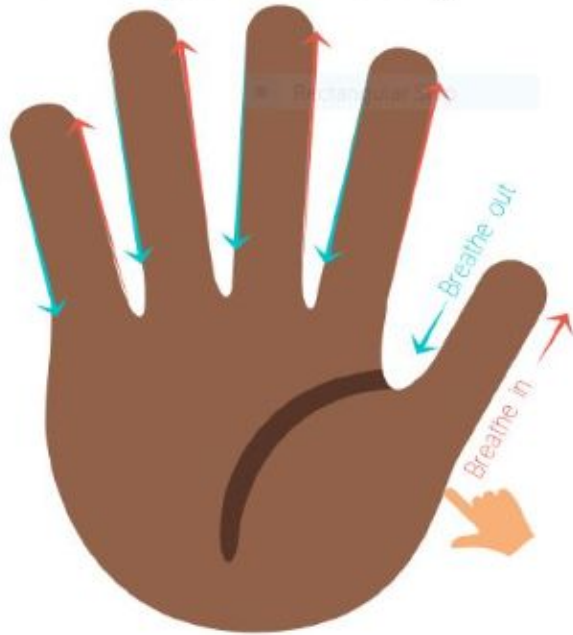


My mental health first aid kit

1. Who I can talk to when feeling stressed or worried:
2. Healthy activities that make me feel better about myself:
3. Three things I can do to calm myself:
4. Words that help me:

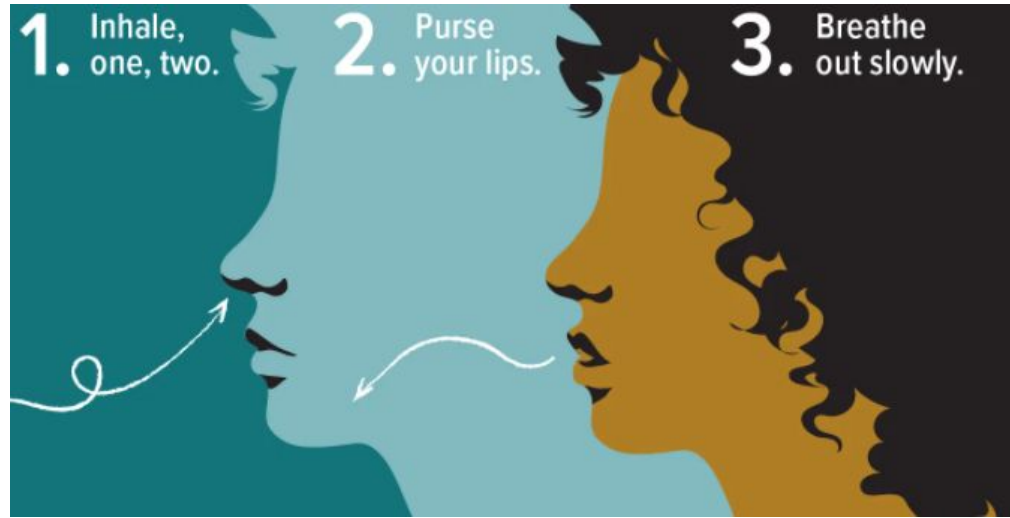


5 Finger Breathing



Smell the soup - breathe in
Cool the soup - breathe out

Soup Breathing



Even just two deep breaths can be calming

Take a moment to breath deeply. Inhale.

Notice your chest rise.

Pause.

Gently purse your lips and blow as if trying to make a candle flame flicker.

Exhale all the way out.

Empty. Empty.

Then breath again. Inhale slowly. Repeat.

Calming and grounding skills

I spy...

5 things I can see

4 things I can touch

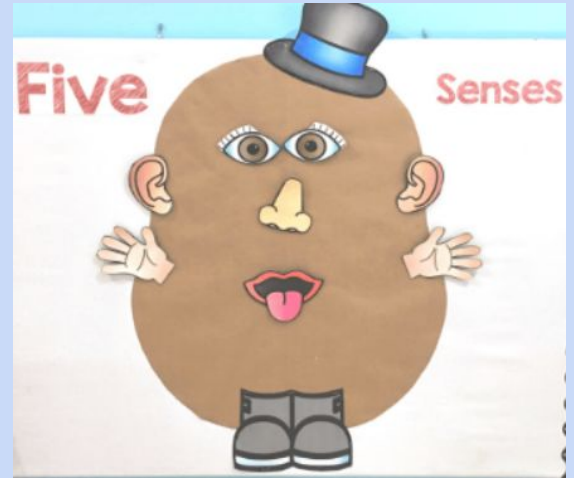
3 things I can hear

2 things I can smell

1 thing I can taste

Notice and name each thing slowly.

Great activity for any age.



MINDFULNESS ACTIVITY

NOTICE, NAME, DESCRIBE WITHOUT JUDGMENT.

Pick something to observe closely.

It can be anything - a leaf, a pen, a cup, a shoe, a tent peg, etc...

Notice every detail about it. What is it made of? What color is it? What textures do you see/feel? Are there designs or markings. Really be curious.

Imagine you are only an inch high, and could walk up to the object. What would you now notice.

Now imagine that you are seeing this object for the very first time! Be really curious, almost puzzled!

Imagine trying to explain it to someone who has also never seen it before.

Reflection questions: What is it like being fully absorbed in noticing and describing something. What did that feel like?

JUDGMENT is deciding if something is "good" or "bad".

No judgment = Just describe.





This is both a mindfulness skill and a way to teach observation without judgment. Great for Scouts who say, “I can’t draw”.

Turn an image upside down.
Now draw the image.

Only draw exactly what you see. Do not try to draw a face.

Draw lines, draw shapes, etc.

Once you have finished your drawing. Turn it upside down (the face will be the right way up).

You will probably see a fairly accurate drawing of a face.

WHY? When you suspend judgment and assumptions, you get a more realistic picture. Our brains are quick to “fill in” patterns - not always with an accurate outcome!

Just the facts...

Present different objects to Scouts, e.g. a pencil, a piece of rope, a toy car, a shoe, a merit badge sash...

First ask the Scouts to tell a story about the object:

Heroic
Failure
Happy
Sad



Then ask the Scouts to ONLY describe exactly what they see.
Just the facts. Only detailed observation. No embellished story!

Discuss how our thinking and language changes how we experience something.

- ***This can also be demonstrated in a hilarious campfire skit..***

THAT'S AWFUL



That's interesting

I SHOULD DO THAT



It's important to me that I do that
I want to. I will do that. Now I am doing it.

ALWAYS



Often, but not always

Never



Sometimes

NOBODY



Some people

Links to some additional resources:

<https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/psychological-first-aid/>

<https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/youth-suicide-prevention/>

<https://health.usnews.com/health-care/patient-advice/articles/2018-05-04/are-there-mental-health-benefits-to-being-a-scout>

<https://www.epickidsaz.com/parents-corner/scouting-may-be-a-solution-to-improving-the-mental-health-crisis-our-youth-is-experiencing-today/>

[Mental Health Matters in Scouting and Beyond](#)



SCOUTING IS A
PROTECTIVE FACTOR
FOR MENTAL
HEALTH IN YOUTH
AND ADULTS!

