

RESOURCE

# Mental Health Toolkit for Head Start



Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

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The Head Start workforce faces a unique set of difficult and challenging stressors. Mental health impacts workplace performance, retention, and staff experience—and thus is a top priority for every leader. In addition to providing the complete [Starling Minds Mental Fitness Program](#) to NHSA Members, our partners at Starling Minds have developed a variety of resources to help you build a compassionate, safe culture for your staff and increase individual resilience.

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Resilient  
Minds.



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RESOURCE

# Mental Health Toolkit for Head Start

Leader's Guide

# Leader's Guide: Signs of Declining Mental Health

Often a leader's or manager's first challenge is simply recognizing the warning signs that an employee or staff member is going through a difficult time. By recognizing the signs, it will allow you to detect any problems early on and help them get help. **If you are not sure if someone is going through a crisis, listen to your gut and take the action needed to support the individual.**

**Goal:** Leaders will learn the critical signs of declining mental health in staff members, which are often presented in their physical appearance, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.



## Signs of Anxiety

### Physical

- Muscle Pain
- Tightening in chest
- Racing heart
- Difficulty sleeping
- Restless and on edge
- Shortness of breath
- Headaches/migraines
- Fidgety and nervous

### Feeling

- Overwhelmed
- Constant dread
- Fearful
- Panic
- Worry
- Judged

### Thinking

- Constantly worried
- Unwanted and intrusive thoughts
- Struggles to see a positive side
- Seems to think the worst

### Behavioral

- Not completing work
- Avoiding tasks
- Difficulty making decisions
- Loss in confidence
- Withdrawing from others
- Taking days off
- Can't switch off



## Signs of Depression

### Physical

- Tired all the time
- Difficulty sleeping
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Sick and run down
- Drained in energy

### Feeling

- Unhappy
- Worthless
- Overwhelmed
- Unmotivated
- Irritable
- Indecisive
- Feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness

### Thinking

- Thinking they are a failure
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm
- Constant self-blaming

### Behavioral

- Don't seem to enjoy hobbies/interests they once did
- Unable to concentrate
- Withdrawing from co-workers or social activities
- Relying on alcohol/drugs
- Unexplained absences or being late to work
- Not meeting deadlines
- Making mistakes
- Seeming irritable or angry

# Leader's Guide: How to Start a Conversation about Mental Health

People are silently struggling with their mental health, but are often too afraid to seek help. **As a leader, it's important to start a conversation about mental health in order to normalize it.** It not only encourages your staff to seek help earlier, but also builds a team culture with safe and open communication which is essential to staff engagement and wellbeing. However, many leaders may not feel comfortable starting a conversation about mental health. We are here to help. You don't need special training to have an open and sincere conversation about mental health. It's a skill you can develop like any other.

**Goal:** This guide will arm you with the knowledge and skills you need to confidently talk about mental health with your team and promote a culture of compassion and empathy. The more you practice these tips, the more confident you will be.

## Expressing Care:

Start by expressing your care followed by an observation.

### For example:

"I care about you and how you are doing. I've noticed you haven't been yourself lately. Would you like to go for a walk?"

"The other day I noticed you seemed upset. I made a note that I wanted to talk with you. I'm worried about how you're doing and wanted to check-in. Whenever you have time, can we grab some coffee and talk about it?"

## Show Support:

In your own way, make sure they know you're there with them and that you care. Be sure to let them know you are listening.

### For example:

"I'm right here with you. Nothing you're going through changes how I feel about you, and how awesome I think you are."

"I really care about you, and I want you to know you can tell me anything."

## Open up:

Open up about your own story but be sure to keep it short. The purpose of sharing your experience is for them to open up about theirs.

### For example:

"I've had times in my life when I've struggled. I went to talk to someone and used an online resource recommended to me. Both really helped me understand what was happening to me."

"I've been through things in my life, too, and I've found that talking about it helped me feel less alone. I wasn't open to talking about it at first, but then found an anonymous online community that allowed me to read and share my experience and feelings with others."

## Tip Sheet: How to Start a Conversation about Mental Health

### Ask how they are coping:

Find out how long they have been feeling this way, and any changes it's caused in their life.

#### For example:

"How long have you felt this way? When did these feelings start?"

"Have these thoughts led to any specific changes in your life, like trouble sleeping or keeping up with work?"

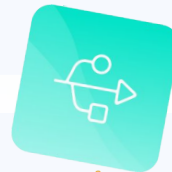
"How did that make you feel when that happened?"

### It's okay to talk about it:

They may feel embarrassed to talk about what they are going through. Help assure them that's not true. Everyone experiences struggles with their mental health.

#### For example:

"You know what? Everyone goes through periods in their life when they're struggling. But just because you're struggling now doesn't mean you'll always feel this way."



### Talking to someone else:

They may not be comfortable sharing with you (their manager), so offer to connect them with someone else.

#### For example:

"Is talking to me about this helping you right now? Or is there someone else you'd feel more comfortable with, who we can bring in to help support you?"

### Relate to a public figure:

There is still a lot of stigma around mental health. To help, reference public figures who have been open about their struggles with mental health.

#### For example:

"You're in good company: a lot of the highest-performing executives and athletes lean on mental health professionals to help them hone their performance. Reaching out for professional guidance and therapy is a strong thing to do, and it can make all the difference."

## Tip Sheet: How to Start a Conversation about Mental Health

### Stop and try again:

It's important to stop a conversation if it's not going well. It doesn't have to be the end of it though. You can try again at a later time.

#### For example:

"I'm sorry, I feel like I can do this better. Can I try this conversation again at a later time?"

### Help them connect:

The hardest step is to get help. Offer to help them connect in whatever way you're comfortable with. Be sure to have resource contact information readily available.

#### For example:

"There's a lot of different, confidential mental health supports for you. It's helped me so maybe it can help you too."



### Privacy Concerns:

If the person is worried about others finding out that they're getting help, let them know you understand and that the resources are confidential.

#### For example:

"I understand your concern and I use to think that as well but I learned that mental health support actually has even greater confidentiality safeguards than physical health treatment."

### If they refuse help:

Not everyone is ready right away. If they refuse your suggestion of professional help (and if they aren't in immediate danger, i.e. that they are not presently self-harming or about to), be patient and don't push too hard.

#### For example:

"It's okay that it doesn't sound like you're ready yet. I really hope you'll think about it. Just let me know if you change your mind, and I can help you connect with someone."

"I know you're going through a lot, and I really believe it can make a big difference in your life, and your health. Just consider it for later, and know I'm here to help."

"If you're not ready to go in and meet with someone in person, there are confidential hotlines available to you for support."

## Tip Sheet: How to Start a Conversation about Mental Health

### Important Note: Before you start

- There's no one right way of expressing things – the main thing is to be thoughtful and genuine
- You don't need to have all the answers – it's about having the conversation and the support you offer by talking
- If what you say doesn't sound quite right, stop and try again. It doesn't have to be the end of the conversation
- Be aware of your body language. To show you're listening, try to maintain eye contact and sit in a relaxed position

### About Starling Minds

Starling Minds™ is a digital mental health platform that delivers immediate, unlimited, and personalized support and training for stress, anxiety, burnout and depression. Based on the principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Starling's leading iCBT platform is powered by an expert system that emulates the processes and practices of human-guided therapy to remove the greatest barriers preventing employees from accessing affordable and effective mental health care—cost, access, and stigma.

Learn more at [starlingminds.com](https://starlingminds.com).



# Leader's Guide: How to Talk to Someone in a Crisis

Managing an employee who is going through a stressful period is one of the real challenges all leaders face. Most of us try to keep work and home separate, but often personal and professional lives collide and how you handle these situations with your staff member is often a test of your leadership. No leader or manager wants to worry about the possibility of a crisis, but they do happen. This does not mean that you have to feel powerless.

**Goal:** Use these helpful tips to navigate these sensitive conversations with more confidence. **If you are not sure if someone is going through a crisis, listen to your gut and take the action needed to support the individual.**



## Do these things:

### 1. Tell them you're there to listen and help them find the next step.

"I'm here to listen and I really want to help you. I'm not a trained counselor or doctor, but I'll do my best to put you on the right path."

### 2. Practice empathy by considering the needs of people different than yourself, especially those in vulnerable populations.

### 3. Pause to reflect on what they have told you and share back your understanding, showing them that they've been heard

### 4. Mirror back what you're hearing in your own words rather than repeating what they've told you

"I just lost my job and I don't know what to do. I have small kids and I don't know if I'll be able to get food on the table. I have no idea if I even qualify for EI."

- **Helpful answer (mirroring):** "I'm hearing you say that you're feeling very overwhelmed with all the uncertainty, and not knowing how to apply for EI is even more frustrating."
- **Unhelpful answer (repeating):** "I'm hearing you say that you're worried about going hungry."

## Tip Sheet: How to Talk to Someone in a Crisis

### 5. Validate their feelings and concerns.

"I'm worried about my son, who lives with a mental illness and doesn't have secure housing. What if he catches this virus?"

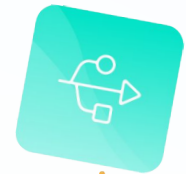
- **Helpful answer:** "I can tell that you care about your son very much. It can be hard not to run through the worst-case scenarios."
- **Unhelpful answer:** "Everyone feels stressed right now. I have two elderly parents, and they have trouble even using a cellphone."

### 6. Ask if it's OK to connect the person with other helpful resources

### 7. Provide specific websites and phone numbers.

### 8. Make sure the resources you're directing people to are currently available.

### 9. When possible, connect the person directly to the resource.



### Do not do these things:

#### 1. Give advice or attempt to solve the problem.

#### 2. Presume you know what the person is thinking or how they are feeling.

#### 3. Try to relate by sharing your own experience. That will just minimize their suffering.

#### 4. Ask leading or "why" questions

"I'm exhausted and I can't fall asleep at night. I'm working full time, my kids are at home, and my parents are elderly. I don't know how long I can keep doing this."

- **Helpful answer (open ended):** "That does sound exhausting. I'm wondering what was most helpful for you in the past when you've been exhausted and overwhelmed?"
- **Unhelpful answer (why):** "Why do you think you can't sleep?"
- **Unhelpful answer (leading):** "When you can't sleep, have you tried this cool meditation app?"

#### 5. Provide resources you aren't sure are relevant or credible.

#### 6. Accept hostility, threats, or abusive language. Calmly ask them to call back when they are ready to speak respectfully

## Tip Sheet: How to Talk to Someone in a Crisis

### Techniques to De-escalate a Crisis

When a mental health crisis is happening, friends and colleagues of that person can often be caught off-guard, unprepared and unsure of what to do. The behaviors of a person experiencing a crisis can be unpredictable and can change dramatically without warning. If you're worried that someone you know is in crisis or nearing a crisis, seek help. Make sure to assess the immediacy of the situation to help determine where to start or who to call.

- Is the person in danger of hurting themselves, others or property?
- Do you need emergency assistance?
- Do you have time to start with a phone call for guidance and support from a mental health professional?

#### Do these things:

- Keep your voice calm
- Avoid overreacting
- Listen to the person
- Express support and concern
- Avoid continuous eye contact
- Ask how you can help
- Keep stimulation level low
- Move slowly
- Offer options instead of trying to take control
- Avoid touching the person unless you ask permission
- Be patient
- Gently announce actions before initiating them
- Give them space, don't make them feel trapped

#### Do not do these things:

- Don't make judgmental comments
- Don't argue or try to reason with the person

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Learn more at [starlingminds.com](https://starlingminds.com).

## Leader's Guide:

# How to Reduce Stigma in the Workplace

Stigma is one of the most powerful barriers to workplace mental health. About 75% of employees and staff have struggled with an issue that affected their mental health. Yet, 8 out of 10 workers with a mental health condition say shame and stigma prevent them from seeking mental health care.

**Goal:** Knowledge and acceptance are powerful tools for reducing stigma – however, it can be hard to know where to start. Whether you are affected by mental illness yourself or your staff, here are 8 ways you can help fight stigma in your workplace.

1. **Know the facts.** Educate yourself about mental illness including substance use disorders. Examine your own judgmental thinking, reinforced by upbringing and society.

**Team Activity:** Play this true or false activity around [myths and misconceptions](#) around mental health

2. **Treat it like a physical illness.** [Educate your team](#) on how mental health and physical health are interconnected and a part of someone's overall health.
3. **Encourage open and honest conversations.** Set the tone by normalizing conversations around mental health within your team. Encourage everyone to speak up when they feel overwhelmed or in need of support.

**Team Activity:** Share your own experiences or stories of other people who have struggled with their mental health, but got help and resumed successful careers.

4. **Choose your words carefully.** The way we speak can affect the attitudes of others.
  - a. For example, instead of saying "She's depressed" say "She has depression."
  - b. Avoid using words that label others, like crazy, nuts, not normal, psycho, schizo, loony
  - c. Don't minimize their experience by saying things like, "It could be worse" or "Just brush it off"

## Tip Sheet: How to Reduce Stigma in the Workplace

- Educate others to notice and respond.** Increase your team’s ability to [recognize the signs](#) of someone who may be struggling with their mental health and connect them to support resources.

**Team Activity:** [Educate your team](#) through role-plays and other activities. These activities offer guidance on how to listen non-judgmentally, offer reassurance, and assess the risk of suicide or self-harm. To educate your team on how to support someone in crisis, check out this [tip sheet](#).

- Focus on the positive.** Mental illness, including addictions, is only part of anyone’s larger picture. Positive thinking helps with stress management and can even improve their health.

**Team Activity:** Practice overcoming negative self-talk with examples provided.

Negative Talking	Positive Talking
I've never done it before.	It's an opportunity to learn something new.
It's too complicated.	I'll tackle it from a different angle.
I don't have the resources.	Necessity is the mother of invention.
I'm too lazy to get this done.	I couldn't fit it into my schedule, but I can re-examine some priorities.
There's no way it will work.	I can try to make it work.
It's too radical a change.	Let's take a chance.
No one bothers to communicate with me.	I'll see if I can open the channels of communication.
I'm not going to get any better at this.	I'll give it another try.

- Be proactive.** Offer access to programs, resources, and education on stress management and resilience-building. [Nearly 70 percent of people](#) said that their employers are not doing enough to prevent or alleviate burnout.

**Team Activity:** Walk through programs and resources available to employees before stress leads to more serious problems.

## Tip Sheet: How to Reduce Stigma in the Workplace

8. **Support people.** Treat everyone with dignity and respect; offer support and encouragement.

**Team Activity:** Go over this list of ways to support helping with their mental health.

- Acknowledge each person's basic dignity.
- Have empathy for their life situation.
- Listen to and encourage their opinions and input.
- Validate each other's contributions.
- Avoid gossip, teasing and other unprofessional behavior.
- Emulate the actions of someone you consider respectful.
- Obey workplace policies and procedures.
- Be sure to be inclusive of people struggling with their mental health, at work and off work.

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Worksheets & Exercises

## TRUE OR FALSE

Not many people struggle with their mental health.





## ANSWER: FALSE

One in five adults experience a mental health issue. One in 20 people live with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression.

## TRUE OR FALSE

People with mental health problems are violent and unpredictable.

2

## ANSWER: FALSE

**The vast majority of people with mental health problems are no more likely to be violent than anyone else.** Most people with mental illness are not violent and only 3%–5% of violent acts can be attributed to individuals living with a serious mental illness. In fact, people with severe mental illnesses are over 10 times more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general population.

## TRUE OR FALSE

People with mental health needs cannot tolerate the stress of holding down a job.

3

## ANSWER: FALSE

People with mental health problems are just as productive as other employees. Employers who hire people with mental health problems report good attendance and punctuality as well as motivation, good work, and job tenure on par with or greater than other employees. This is because many of them build the skills and habits they need to manage their stress without burning out.

## TRUE OR FALSE

Personality or character flaws cause mental health problems. They can snap out of it if they try hard enough.

4

## ANSWER: FALSE

Mental health problems have nothing to do with being lazy or weak and many people need help to get better. Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including Biological factors, such as genes, physical illness, injury, or brain chemistry, life experiences, such as trauma or a history of abuse, family history of mental health problems. People with mental health problems can get better and many recover completely.

## TRUE OR FALSE

Once someone develops mental health problems, he or she will never recover.

5



## ANSWER: FALSE

Studies show that people with mental health problems get better and many recover completely.

**Note:** Recovery refers to the process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. There are more treatments, services, and community support systems than ever before, and they work.

## TRUE OR FALSE

Therapy and self-help are a waste of time.

6

## ANSWER: FALSE

Treatment for mental health problems which includes medication, therapy, or both are proven to help support and heal someone. Many individuals work with a support system during the healing and recovery process.

## TRUE OR FALSE

I can't do anything for someone with a mental health problem.

7

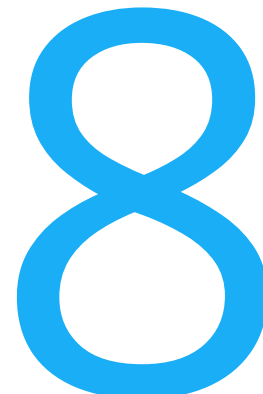
## ANSWER: FALSE

Friends and loved ones can make a big difference. They can be important influences to help someone get the treatment and services they need by:

- Reaching out and letting them know you are available to help
- Helping them access mental health services
- Learning and sharing the facts about mental health, especially if you hear something that isn't true
- Treating them with respect, just as you would anyone else
- Refusing to define them by their diagnosis or using labels such as "crazy"

## TRUE OR FALSE

Texting, phoning regularly and inviting people out socially can really help someone who is suffering from depression and other mental health problems.



## ANSWER: TRUE

Keeping in contact with your friend, even if they don't answer your texts or won't meet you, can really help someone suffering from depression. Don't give up on them!

## TRUE OR FALSE

If someone is depressed, they need to forget about how they are feeling. So don't ask how they are, just talk about other things.

9



## ANSWER: FALSE

It's good to ask 'How are you?' Don't be afraid to do this, but be prepared to listen if they want to talk. Talking about ordinary things is important as well.

## TRUE OR FALSE

You should never talk to someone who may be feeling depressed about suicide, as this may encourage them to attempt suicide.

10

## ANSWER: FALSE

Talking to someone who is feeling suicidal can help reduce the risk of them actually harming themselves. Talking to them might actually help save their life.

## Exercise:

# 5 Stages of Burnout: Are you burning out?

Burnout symptoms vary depending on which phase of burnout you're in. In general, there are three symptoms to be aware of: exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment.

### Stage 1: Honeymoon Phase

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job satisfaction         | <input type="checkbox"/> Commitment to job           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accepting responsibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Compulsion to prove oneself |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustained energy levels  | <input type="checkbox"/> Free-flowing creativity     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unbridled optimism       | <input type="checkbox"/> High productivity levels    |

#### What to do:

Practice Recharge and Relaxation

ie. Exercise, Breathing techniques, Reading, etc

### Stage 2: Onset of Stress

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inability to focus          | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability                | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoidance of decision making |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced sleep quality       | <input type="checkbox"/> Change in appetite fatigue   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of social interactions | <input type="checkbox"/> Headache                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lower productivity          | <input type="checkbox"/> Neglect of personal needs    |

#### What to do:

Practicing positive coping strategies

ie. Set boundaries, talk to someone you trust, spend time with family

### Stage 3: Chronic Stress

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent tiredness | <input type="checkbox"/> Denial of problems  | <input type="checkbox"/> Aggressive behavior |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Procrastination      | <input type="checkbox"/> Feel threatened     | <input type="checkbox"/> Apathy              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resentfulness        | <input type="checkbox"/> Feel pressured      | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic exhaustion  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social withdrawal    | <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol Consumption | <input type="checkbox"/> Cynical attitude    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lower sexual desire  | <input type="checkbox"/> Drug Consumption    |  |

#### What to do:

Build a self-care routine

ie. Exercise, meditation, change in diet/lifestyle, adjust sleep habits, take vacation

### Stage 4: Burnout

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Obsession with problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic headaches                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pessimistic outlook     | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic gastrointestinal problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical symptoms       | <input type="checkbox"/> Neglect of personal needs         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-doubt              | <input type="checkbox"/> Escapist activities               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social isolation        | <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioral changes                |

#### What to do:

Get Professional Help

ie. Find and mental health professionals to help you rebuild your resilience

### Stage 5: Habitual Burnout

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic sadness        | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic physical fatigue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic mental fatigue | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression               |

#### What to do:

Get Professional Help  
Build a self-care routine  
Take a vacation

## Breathing Exercises

This document outlines different types of breathing techniques to help you and your team practice more mindfulness. Regular breathing exercises can lead to better mental health and positive emotions, and alleviate stress and depression. It can also help you and your team think more clearly and reduce feelings of anxiety.

**How to use this document:** Each breathing exercise takes no more than 5 minutes and can be used at the beginning or end of a work day. It includes information on each breathing exercise and what it is best used for.

If you have any questions regarding this document, please reach out to [members@starlingminds.com](mailto:members@starlingminds.com).

# Box Breathing

**What:** Box breathing is a simple but powerful relaxation technique. Athletes, healthcare workers, and Navy SEALs, and police officers use this technique to meditate and lower their stress.

**Best for:** The exercise aims to return your breathing pattern to a relaxed rhythm to clear and calm your mind improving your focus.

## How to do Box Breathing

**Step 1:** Breathe in counting to four slowly. Feel the air enter your lungs.

**Step 2:** Hold your breath for 4 seconds. Try to avoid inhaling or exhaling for 4 seconds.

**Step 3:** Slowly exhale through your mouth for 4 seconds.

**Step 4:** Repeat steps 1 to 3 until you feel re-centered.

**Tip:** Try this Box Breathing exercise guided by Mental Fitness Coach, Tara Achkar, featured in the Starling video section.

[Watch Now](#)

# Diaphragmatic Breathing

**What:** Diaphragmatic breathing is a breathing exercise that helps strengthen your diaphragm, an important and most efficient muscle that enables you to breathe better and more deeply.

**Best for:** The exercise aims to strengthen your capacity to breathe and bring more balance and relaxation into your life.

## How to do Diaphragmatic breathing

**Step 1:** Breathe slowly through the nose

**Step 2:** Pause between the inhale and exhalation

**Step 3:** Release the air slowly through pursed lips

**Tip:** Try our Diaphragmatic exercise guided by Mental Fitness Coach, Tara Achkar, featured in the Starling video section.

[Watch Now](#)

## Single Nostril Breathing

**What:** Single nostril breathing can bring better balance to your mind and body. It's a widely regarded yoga breathing technique to help reduce anxiety and enhance meditation.

**Best for:** The exercise activates your parasympathetic (rest-and-digest) nervous system to help you relax, calm down and feel more at peace.

### How to do Single Nostril Breathing

**Step 1:** Sit comfortably with a straight spine

**Step 2:** Block your right nostril and inhale through the left nostril + a gentle breath retention

**Step 3:** Block your left nostril and exhale through the right nostril + gentle breath retention

**Tip:** Try our Single Nostril Breathing guided by Mental Fitness Coach, Tara Achkar, featured in the Starling video section.

[Watch Now](#)



# Alternate Nostril Breathing

**What:** Alternate Nostril Breathing is a simple and powerful way to settle your mind, body, and emotions. Research has shown that practicing this technique for 10 minutes brings the most benefits to you.

**Best for:** The exercise helps restore balance in your left and right sides of your brain, ease your mind, and refocuses you.

## How to do Alternate Nostril Breathing

**Step 1:** Sit comfortably with a straight spine

**Step 2:** Inhale through the left nostril and then close the nostril

**Step 3:** Open the right nostril and exhale through this side

**Step 4:** Inhale through the right nostril and then close the nostril

**Step 5:** Open the left nostril and exhale through the left side

**Tip:** Try our Alternate Nostril Breathing guided by Mental Fitness Coach, Tara Achkar, featured in the Starling video section.

[Watch Now](#)

# Fire Breathing

**What:** Breath of Fire involves passive, normal inhalations and powerful, rapid exhalations. This style of breathing may help reduce stress, boost brain function, improve respiratory health and digestion, and strengthen the abdominal muscles.

**Best for:** The exercise helps correct low blood circulation in the body, strengthens your lungs, and increases your energy and focus.

## How to do Fire Breathing

**Step 1:** Sit comfortably with a straight spine

**Step 2:** Contract your lower belly as you exhale

**Step 3:** Release the contraction and inhale naturally

**Step 4:** Repeat the exercise slowly for around 8 to 10 rounds

**Step 5:** Slowly release your breath and come back to normal breathing

**Tip:** Try our Fire Breathing guided by Mental Fitness Coach, Tara Achkar, featured in the Starling video section.

[Watch Now](#)

# Right Nostril Breathing

**What:** Right Nostril Breathing is a technique for people who need more energy, clarity and focus.

**Best for:** The exercise is effective for low energy, stress management, and anxiety.

## How to do Right Nostril Breathing

**Step 1:** Sit comfortably with a straight spine

**Step 2:** Inhale through the right nostril

**Step 3:** Gently hold your breath in for a moment

**Step 4:** Exhale through the left nostril

**Step 5:** And repeat by inhaling through the right nostril again

**Tip:** Try our Right Nostril Breathing guided by Mental Fitness Coach, Tara Achkar, featured in the Starling video section.

[Watch Now](#)

# Double Breathing

**What:** The Double Breathing technique activates the breath in short bursts. It's these active movements that excite the sympathetic nervous system and make you more alert.

**Best for:** The exercise sharpens your mind, increases your energy, and great to practice in the morning if you are feeling sluggish or low in energy.

## How to do Double Breathing

**Step 1:** Inhale through the nose with a short, sharp inhalation followed directly by a long and strong inhalation

**Step 2:** Then without pausing, exhale through the nose and mouth with a short, then long exhale

**Step 3:** Repeat 5 times then pause for a short break before beginning your next round

**Step 4:** Get ready to feel super amped!

**Tip:** Try our Double Breathing guided by Mental Fitness Coach, Tara Achkar, featured in the Starling video section.

[Watch Now](#)

# Ocean Breathing

**What:** Ocean breathing is a practice that is used in meditation and yoga as a way to unify the mind and the body.

**Best for:** The exercise helps calm the mind and body and brings on many benefits: stronger lungs with an increased capacity, healthier heart and strong diaphragm. It can even help with asthma.

## How to do Ocean Breathing

**Step 1:** Inhale and exhale through the nose whilst constricting your throat. Keep your mouth closed

**Step 2:** Constrict your throat to the point that your breathing makes a rushing noise, almost like snoring

**Step 3:** Control your breath with your diaphragm

**Step 4:** Keep your inhalations and exhalations equal in duration

**Tip:** Try our Ocean Breathing guided by Mental Fitness Coach, Tara Achkar, featured in the Starling video section.

[Watch Now](#)

# Three-Part Breathing

**What:** Three-part breathing exercise works in three ways: calming your mind, soothing your nervous system, and improving your awareness of your lung capacity.

**Best for:** The exercise relaxes and grounds you to the present moment and calms your mind. It teaches you to breathe more fully and completely.

## How to do Three-Part Breathing

**Step 1:** Inhale through the nose ( $\frac{1}{3}$  of your breath), allowing your belly to expand softly

**Step 2:** Inhale through your lower chest ( $\frac{1}{3}$  of your breath), allowing your lower chest to expand

**Step 3:** Inhale through your upper chest ( $\frac{1}{3}$  of your breath) allowing your upper chest to expand Exhale all the air out from your nose, taking your belly button closer to your spine

**Tip:** Try our Three-Part Breathing guided by Mental Fitness Coach, Tara Achkar, featured in the Starling video section.

Watch Now

## More Breathing Exercises

For more breathing exercises, be sure to check out Wellness Wednesday.

**Bi-weekly on Wednesdays: 4.30 pm PT | 6.30 pm CT | 7.30 pm ET**

[Watch Now](#)

## Exercise:

# Brain Games to Improve Your Mind

Believe it or not but research and studies have shown that playing games can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. These games help foster feelings of social connection, a sense of achievement, and emotional regulation skills, among other benefits. Playing games can help us change the way we think and behave, such as making us more courageous, ambitious, and goal-oriented.

Use these brain games to help your team improve their mind's health, as well as offer your team a quick and fun activity to engage in together.

### Game 1: The Color Game

**Activity Time:** 5 minutes

**Best for:** Team Huddles

Ask the team to write out a list of color names, and change the color of the actual text so that it does not correspond to the color referred to.

Here's an example:

**Black Blue Yellow Green Red Purple Orange Pink Black**

Now, ask them to read out loud the color each word is written in, not the word itself. Time how fast they can do it. Tell them not to worry if they aren't able to do it at first. It's harder than anyone thinks.

Ask them to move as quickly as they can through the set, and then start again to see if they can improve their times. If this game is played again, ask them to create another, larger set and try timing themselves again.



# Exercise:

## Brain Games to Improve Your Mind

### Game 2: Create a Story

**Activity Time:** 10 minutes

**Best for:** Department Staff Meeting or Team-Building Event

Practicing creativity has been [linked to better brain health](#), and what better way to be creative than to tell a group story? Break the teams of 3 - 5.

Get them to sit together in a circle and have each team member start by writing an opening line on a piece of paper. This could be as simple as "The boy woke up and walked down the street to the store." From there, ask them to pass the paper clockwise around the circle and keep going for 5 minutes and have everyone add a line that builds on the line before it. At the end of 5 minutes, have each team read the story (aloud if possible). Chances are, you'll come up with a funny tale that's a perfect combination of everyone's creativity!

# Exercise:

## Brain Games to Improve Your Mind

### Game 3: Test Your Memory

**Activity Time:** 5 minutes

**Best for:** Team Huddles, Department Staff Meetings, or Team-Building Event

For this game, pull up a simple picture of an interior or exterior scene. The scene should have several elements to it. For example, a picture of a pond with a bench, some ducks, a walking path, a jogger, a tree, and a tulip bed. Use the one below if you like!

Once you've found an ideal image, present it to the team and ask them to study it for one minute. At the end of one minute, turn the picture face-down and allow the team to write down all the items they remember. Then, turn the photo back over and see what (if anything) they've missed. Complete the practice a second time to see if they do any better on the subsequent round!



# Exercise:

## Brain Games to Improve Your Mind

### Game 4: Hidden Object

**Activity Time:** 5 minutes

**Best for:** Team Huddles, Department Staff Meetings, or Team-Building Event

One thing that boosts the performance and output of the brain is visual searching. Games like “Where’s Waldo” and similar “hidden object” challenges are ideal for this. Use the next few images for a few games. You can add a time limit for the team.

Can you find these objects hidden in the picture?











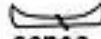




-  hot dog
-  sheep
-  fish
-  crescent moon
-  teacup
-  pointy hat
-  crown
-  teapot
-  ghost
-  comet
-  glove
-  tube of toothpaste
-  artist's brush
-  snake
-  screwdriver
-  horseshoe
-  book
-  banana
-  ice-cream cone
-  spoon







**CLUES**

-  book
-  flashlight
-  tooth
-  turkey
-  tent
-  paperclip
-  cane
-  loaf of bread
-  paintbrush
-  belt
-  canoe
-  cake slice
-  dog
-  bell
-  glasses

Can you find in the picture the objects listed on the right?

# Picnic Day



paintbrush



ice-cream cone



strawberry



baseball bat



flashlight



crown



broccoli



balloon



envelope



fish



tennis racket



wedge of lemon



arrow



umbrella



ladder



crayon



egg



bell



book

# Exercise:

## Brain Games to Improve Your Mind

### Game 5: The Shortest Short Story

**Activity Time:** 5 - 10 minutes

**Best for:** Department Staff Meetings, or Team-Building Event

Chances are, each team member has written a short story before. Regardless of whether they were in college or high school, they've probably penned a 300-500 word tale they either read out loud or submitted. Now, it's time to draw on those skills and create another short story that's even, well, shorter!

Ask your team to use just seven words to craft a complete story. This game challenges their creativity and requires them to search their brain for the most impactful vocabulary.

For example, consider Ernest Hemingway's iconic 6-word story: "For sale: Baby shoes, never worn." Ask them to then, go around the room and read them aloud!

# Exercise:

## My Not-to-Do List

A not-to-do list is more important than a to-do-list. A powerful not-to-do-list will consciously help you break bad habits, lower your risk of burnout, and actually improve your productivity in the long-run. Use this exercise sheet to stay up-to-date on tasks that are worth your time.

**Things that are out of my control**

**Things that waste my time**

**Things I feel obliged to do**

**Things that are other people's responsibilities**

**Things I do not trust anyone else to do well enough**

**Things that actually do not need to be done**

**Things that someone else could do, but don't**

**Actions:**



## Exercise:

# Gratitude Journal

A gratitude journal is a tool to keep track of the good things in life. No matter how difficult and defeating life can sometimes feel, there is always something to feel grateful for.

### Before you start your day

#### I am grateful for...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### What would make today great?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### Daily Affirmation

### At the end of your day

#### Highlights of the Day

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### What did I learn today?

## List:

# The Basics of Self Care

Maintaining your physical and mental health helps you build resilience and manage stress. Here is a list of ideas and activities you can use to take care of yourself - even if it's only the basics.

### Basic

- 7 - 9 hours of sleep at night
- Drink water
- Eat a meal
- Get fresh air
- Washing up/brushing up

### Emotional

- Buy something that makes you feel good
- Call a family member
- Connect with friends
- Do something for someone else
- Do something you love to do
- Give thanks
- Talk to a friend

### Mental or Activities

- Declutter your desk or room
- Give yourself credit
- Listen to a podcast
- Read for 15 minutes
- Read inspirational quotes
- Set a daily goal for a week

- Spend a day social media free
- Take a 30-min nap
- Unplug
- Warm Bath
- Watch a movie or show
- Write in a journal

### Physical Activities

- Cook your favorite food
- Dance or music
- Go for a walk
- Meditate
- Move your body

- Notice your breath
- Plan a fun day out
- Practice deep breathing
- Start a new hobby
- Stretch for 10-15 minutes

# Checklist:

## How to Set Healthy Boundaries

Personal boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves within relationships. A person with healthy boundaries can say “no” to others when they want to, but they are also comfortable opening themselves up to intimacy and close relationships.

### What to Say

You always have the right to say “no”. When doing so, express yourself clearly and without ambiguity so there is no doubt about what you want.

“I’m not comfortable with this”	“Please don’t do that”	“Not at this time”
“I can’t do that for you”	“This doesn’t work for me”	“I’ve decided not to”
“This is not acceptable”	“I’m drawing the line at ___”	“I don’t want to do that”

### What to Do

**Use Confident Body Language:** Face the other person, make eye contact, and use a steady tone of voice at an appropriate volume (not too quiet, and not too loud).

**Be Respectful:** Avoid yelling, using put-downs, or giving the silent treatment. It’s okay to be firm, but your message will be better received if you are respectful.

**Plan Ahead:** Think about what you want to say, and how you will say it, before entering a difficult discussion. This can help you feel more confident about your position.

**Compromise:** When appropriate, listen and consider the needs of the other person. You never have to compromise, but give-and-take is part of any healthy relationship.

## Exercise: How to Set Healthy Boundaries

**Instructions:** Respond to the following practice questions as if you were really in each situation. Think about the language you would use to firmly state your boundary.

### For example:

**Situation:** You notice your roommate has been eating your food in the fridge. You never discussed plans to share food, and don't want them eating what you bought.

- **Response:** *"I'd like to keep our food separate. If there's something of mine that you want, please ask me before taking it."*

**Situation:** Your friend calls you at 11 pm to discuss issues she is having with her boyfriend. You need to wake up at 6 am.

- **Response:** *"I can tell you're upset. I want to talk to you, but I need to go to bed. Maybe we can talk tomorrow afternoon."*

### Exercise:

- **Situation #1:** You invited a friend over for the evening, but now it's getting late. You would like to get ready for bed, but your friend seems unaware of how late it is.
  - **Response #1:**
- **Situation #2:** A good friend asks you out on a date. You are not interested in being more than friends. You would like to let them down clearly, but gently.
  - **Response #2:**

- **Situation #3:** You missed several days of work due to a medical condition. When you get back, a coworker asks what happened. You feel this information is personal, and do not want to share.
  - **Response #3:**
  
- **Situation #4:** Your brother asks if you can watch his two young children on Saturday morning. You already have plans.
  - **Response #4:**
  
- **Situation #5:** Your coworker is upset about their recent performance review. They start yelling and slamming their fist on their desk. This is making you very uncomfortable.
  - **Response #5:**
  
- **Situation #6:** A salesperson comes to your door during dinner. You try to politely show disinterest, but they keep giving their sales pitch. You want to get back to dinner.
  - **Response #6:**

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**Great job!**

# Worksheet:

## Build Your Coping Toolbox

A coping toolbox is a collection of skills, techniques, items, and other suggestions that you can turn to when you start to feel anxious or distressed.

<b>Step 1: Identify 1 - 5 Triggers</b>	<b>Step 2: Identify 1 - 5 Warnings Signs</b>
<b>Step 3: Identify 1 - 5 Coping Techniques</b>	<b>Step 4: Identify 1 - 5 Strengths about yourself</b>

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