



Workshop 1: Introduction to Mental Health



U OK? is a series of workshops, co-produced with students. They aim to support student mental health through the transition out of further education, into higher education, the world of work and training.

Each workshop is led by two student facilitators, Mental Health Ambassadors.



INTRODUCTION WORKSHOP

The purpose of this workshop is to raise awareness of the potential challenges that students could face when they leave further education and begin their next steps, and to discuss ways to deal with those challenges. You're not expected to have all the answers, but to help start the conversation that will get them thinking about how to manage their mental health, and to signpost them to where they can go for support should they need it.

CONTENTS

Introduction

Using the session plan	4
Overview	5
Timetable	6

Session plan

Introduction	7
Factors and Coping Strategies	9
Expanding Coping Strategies	13
Reflection and Close	15

OPTIONAL

Alternative icebreakers	17
-------------------------	----

Timings

We give you an indicative timing for each activity. You might find this needs adjusting slightly as you prepare. We suggest an optional task that you can run if you have time. If you don't have time, skip the optional task and move on to Reflection & Close.

How to do it

The instructions for each activity are split into steps, which you should either: DO (handing things out, putting up slides), SAY (the key messages and instructions for the activity) or ASK (prompt questions to extend the discussion or gauge understanding).



Discussion based
activity



Activity



Break

Notes and troubleshooting

We provide extra information that may be helpful when you're running the activity, such as adaptations you could make, considerations about managing the class, or key preparations for the lesson.

Read the lesson plan in advance

As part of your preparation, you should read the lesson plan in full.

You'll need to decide with your co-Mental Health Ambassador who will deliver each section of the lesson.

It's not a script:

The session plan provides sentence examples, but it's not a word-for-word script that you can simply read out. It may be helpful to make key notes about what you're going to say but avoid writing full sentences.

Try and practice beforehand so you feel more confident and less likely to read from the page.

OVERVIEW

Workshop aims:

- ✓ To increase students' knowledge of risk and protective factors that impact mental health during times of life transition.
- ✓ To be able to identify which sources of stress they are most susceptible to, so they can anticipate challenges and support themselves
- ✓ To improve understanding of how to maintain good mental health
- ✓ To raise awareness of services that can support mental health needs

Resources you will need:

In person:

- ✓ Character resource
- ✓ Our best mental health tips
- ✓ Signposting resource
- ✓ Pens and paper

Online:

- ✓ Character resource
- ✓ Our best mental health tips
- ✓ Signposting resource
- ✓ Jamboard

Preparation Checklist

- ✓ Meet with co-facilitator(s) and decide who will run each section
- ✓ Check you can access all resource materials
- ✓ Make sure you have the Zoom link for the call (if delivering online)
- ✓ Read the session in full

TIMETABLE

Workshop Duration: 2 hours

Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Icebreaker • Welcome • Ground rules 	20 mins
Factors and Coping Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity Part 1: Factors • Activity Part 2: Coping Strategies 	40 mins
Break	10 mins
Expanding Coping Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing MHF's best mental health tips • Memory Activity <div>OPTIONAL</div>	25 mins
Reflection and Close	25 mins



INTRODUCTION

Welcome
5 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

SAY:

Thank the group for attending, explain that yourself and your other MHAs will be facilitating this workshop

If comfortable sharing, tell the group why you are passionate about mental health.

Explain:

- Mental health is something we all have, and we all have pressures that impact it in different ways. Some of these pressures increase or change when we transition from further education to higher education, employment or training.
- This workshop aims to explore what some of these pressures are, and what we can do about them.



INTRODUCTION

Ice-breaker
10 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

SAY:

Explain that you will spend a few minutes on introductions and learning a little about each other.

ASK:

Starting with MHAs, ask everyone to share their;

- Name, pronouns (if comfortable) and course
- If their day was an animal what it would be and why?

VARIATIONS:

Feel free to swap the icebreaker out for one of your own or use one of the alternatives on page 17



INTRODUCTION

Ground rules

5 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

SAY:

"To make sure we get the most out of this session, together we will create a list of ground rules"

ASK:

Ask everyone to share rules that would help them feel safe, supported and get the most out of the session. Examples include;

- Treating each other with respect
- Not interrupting
- No phones

DO:

Add "be aware of triggers" if it is not mentioned by participants, and explain:

- That talking about mental health can be very personal and sensitive
- That you want everyone to feel free and open to share, but they should consider how sharing their personal experiences might make others in the group feel.
- If it could be triggering but it is something they would like or feel like they need support with, they should message one of the workshop facilitators who will be able to signpost them to the appropriate person or organisation.

VARIATIONS:

You can create this list by asking people to call out, or anonymously using post-it notes or online using the jamboard



FACTORS AND COPING STRATEGIES

Activity Part 1: Factors

20 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

RESOURCES: Character handout/Jamboard OR Flipchart paper with bucket drawn on and post-it notes

SAY:

"In this activity we will explore the various factors in a person's life that can contribute to stress, anxiety and other mental health problems"

DO:

- Put everyone in small groups of 2 or 3
- Handout a character from the **character resource** to each group, or send a link and assign a character/number of characters to each group.
- Ask them to discuss what might be contributing to stress, pressure or mental health problems for this character – we will call these 'factors'.
- Bring the groups back together.
 - In person: ask the groups to put their factors on post-it notes and put them inside the bucket on the flipchart
 - Online: share the link to the jamboard and ask all groups to add the factors they came up with (without repeating any) - inside the bucket on board 2
- Talk through the post-it notes and ask the group to explain why they chose them.

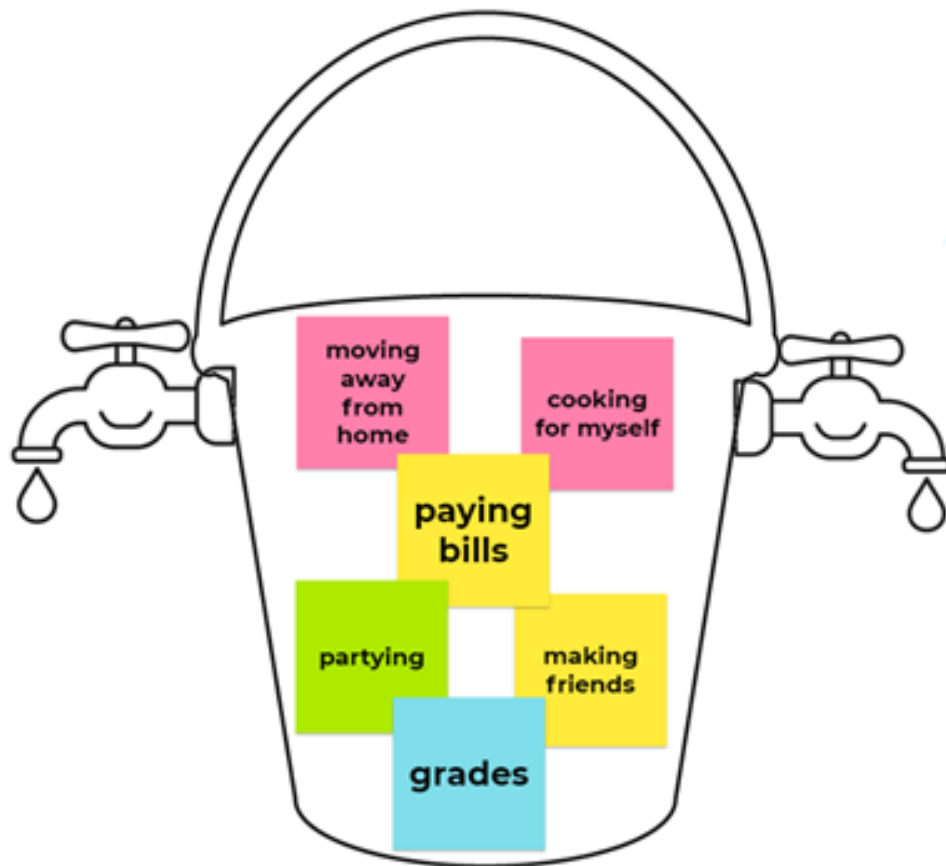
KEY MESSAGES:

The bucket represents our capacity to manage stress/pressure.

ASK:

- If anyone has any other factors not discussed in the activity that they would like to add.
- Ask a volunteer to say which of these factors have the biggest and smallest impact on mental health
- Ask if anyone disagrees. There are no right or wrong answers, and it's unlikely they'll agree; the purpose is for them to debate their own viewpoint and to hear the viewpoints of others.
- Point out how full the bucket is – perhaps it is even overflowing and ask the group what they would do now if, like the bucket, their space and ability to deal with pressure is full, or almost full?

FACTORS EXAMPLE



OPTIONAL IN-PERSON VARIATION:

In groups ask participants to identify 'factors' as stated in the activity, but instead of putting those factors on post-it notes and sticking them on flipchart, use cups of water and a jug.



- Place an empty jug in the middle of the room, and seat everyone around it in a circle. Fill several cups with water, enough for at least one full cup per person.
- Explain that the jug represents our capacity to deal with pressure and stress. The water in their cups represents the factors we identified previously
- Ask each person to take it in turns to fill the jug with their water while telling the rest of the group what their water represents. The amount of water they pour should represent how much pressure they think this factor puts on them.
- As the jug fills up, ask participants what they think this exercise shows us; we all have many varying factors that put pressure on us at any one time.
- Once the jug starts getting too full for others to take their turn, ask the group what they would do now if, like the jug, their space and ability to deal with pressure is full, or almost full?



FACTORS AND COPING STRATEGIES

Activity Part 2: Coping Strategies
20minutes

HOW TO DO IT

RESOURCE: Jamboard (online) / Post it notes (in person)

SAY:

To relieve some of that pressure, we all naturally employ 'coping strategies'. These are the things we do or put in place to relieve pressure and help us cope with difficult feelings.

Like turning on a tap to let water out of a full bucket, coping strategies help combat stress by giving us outlets to help us deal with our feelings.

KEY MESSAGES

Helpful coping strategies:

Relieve pressure in a healthy way which help in the long term, such as;

- getting support, going for a run, talking an issue through with a family member, getting advice from friends, mindfulness.

Unhelpful coping strategies:

Are things that may feel like they are relieving pressure in the short term but can actually be damaging in the long term, such as;

- avoidance of problems, short term solutions that don't help in the long term, disordered eating, drinking.

ASK:

A volunteer to share a helpful coping strategy they use to cope with pressure and stress, and to illustrate how the strategy relieves pressure – add these to the right of the bucket (shown in example on next page).

Ask a volunteer to share an unhelpful coping strategy – add this to the left of the bucket (shown in example on next page).

Repeat until there are several examples

SAY:

Explain that helpful coping strategies relieve pressure and make space in the bucket, whereas unhelpful strategies will actually recycle the pressure back into the bucket by prolonging the feelings of stress

SAY:

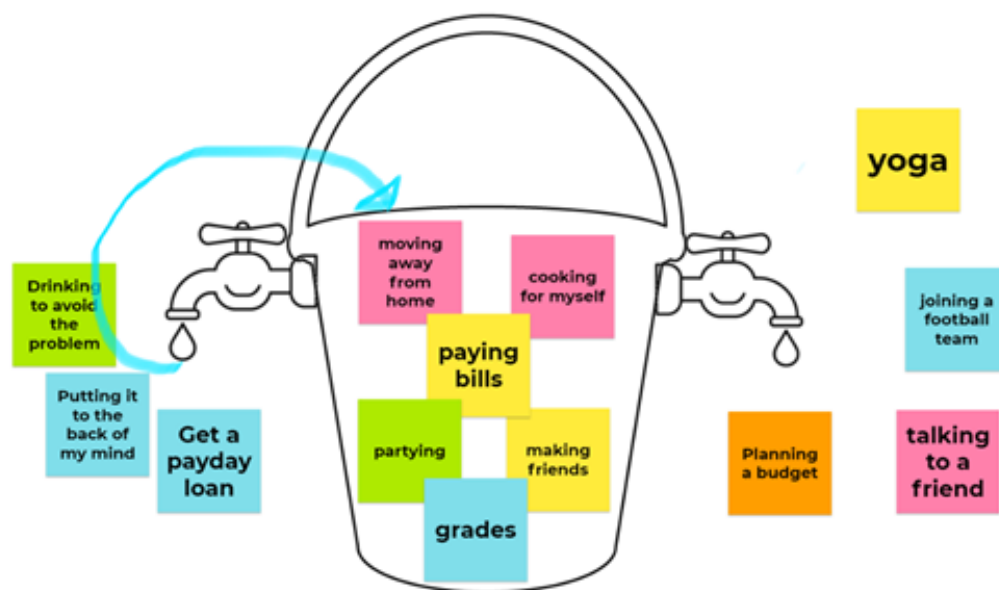
Embedding helpful coping strategies into our daily lives frees up more capacity for us to cope with life's pressures. As the bucket empties, we now have more space for those pressures that we didn't have space for before.

No one can be expected to cope with all of life's pressures without taking time for ourselves and our mental health.

Explain that each of our buckets will look different – no one will have the exact same set of pressures as someone else, and we'll all have different coping strategies that work for us.

If you want to, and feel it's appropriate, you could share what you think your own personal bucket would look like / consist of, and what coping strategies you use.

COPING STRATEGIES EXAMPLE



OPTIONAL IN-PERSON VARIATION (Jug variation part 2):

- Tell the participants that our empty cups now represent our coping strategies and explain what this term means if they haven't heard it before.
- The participants should take it in turns to share something they do to cope with pressure and stress and illustrate how the activity relieves pressure by pouring water from the jug into their cup. The amount of water they pour should correlate with how much pressure they feel is relieved from it





BREAK
10 minutes



EXPANDING COPING STRATEGIES
Introducing MHF's best mental health tips
10 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

RESOURCE: Our best mental health tips

SAY:

Explain that The Mental Health Foundation's mental health tips are a list of strategies that have been put together by experts from around the world through consultation with the public. Some will be coping strategies discussed before the break, others will be new.

DO:

- Put everyone into groups of 2 or 3.
- Handout the [Our best mental health tips](#) or send link online
- In their groups ask participants to discuss which of these they do easily, and which are harder to achieve/they never do.
- Bring the groups back together and ask them to share what they discussed.

ASK:

If there is any correlation between how much effort something is and how much benefit it brings.



EXPANDING COPING STRATEGIES

Memory Activity
15 minutes

OPTIONAL

HOW TO DO IT

DO:

- Ask the group to form a circle in the middle of the room.

SAY:

"We will be playing a memory game to think of our own coping strategies that we could use when we are struggling with different life pressures.

DO:

Begin the game by stating a coping strategy

e.g. 'My name is Claire and my coping strategy is knitting'

The next person will need to repeat the coping strategies that were said before them and come up with a new one

e.g. 'Her name is Claire and her coping strategy is knitting, my name is Mo and my coping strategy is Meditation'

Continue going around the group until everyone has said the coping strategies before them and their own.

SAY:

"We can use the coping strategies that have been mentioned to help us combat different life pressures. Now we've all suggested a coping strategy, you might want to try a new strategy one of your peers has mentioned today."



REFLECTION & CLOSE

Reflection: Applying this to ourselves
20 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

RESOURCE: Jamboard (online) / Paper and post-it notes (in person)

SAY:

While we may have found some effective ways of managing our mental health, there could be others we haven't tried yet that we might find even more effective. It's good to have a whole range of strategies available to us to call on in different situations.

Explain that finding some of these ways to wellbeing difficult is not unusual, and most of us won't have thought about the positive impact they have on us.

DO:

- Hand out a sheet of paper per person and yellow, green and pink post-it notes
 - Online: ask everyone to take a page of the jamboard each (they can put their name on top or keep it anonymous)
- On their own page, ask everyone to write one or more of the mental health tips, that they don't currently do or rarely do, on yellow post-it notes
- On green post-it notes, write down their barriers to doing this. What is it that stops them or makes it difficult to do?
- Once everyone has at least one way to wellbeing and barrier, ask them to spend some time reviewing each other's.
- Ask them to add suggestions and tips to each other's pages using pink post-it notes.

ACTIVITY EXAMPLE

**Sleep
well**

My mind races
at night, I find
it hard to
switch off

Download
Headspace.
Their
sleepcasts
work for me
everytime

Try avoiding
screens before
bed



REFLECTION & CLOSE

Close

5 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

RESOURCE: Tips and Signposting Handout

DO:

Share the link to the Tips and Signposting Handout and explain that it covers some of the topics we have looked at in the session, and signposts for more information and resources.

DO:

Share the link to the feedback sheet and ask everyone to complete it. The more feedback we have the more we are able to evidence the use and impact of workshops like these, and encourage more institutions to run them.

Ask the group to complete the feedback survey before leaving the session. The link and QR code to access it are below.

Feedback is vital to the success and expansion of this project.

<https://linktr.ee/mhfuok?>





There are suggested icebreakers for each workshop, feel free to swap these out with one of your own, or one of the ideas on this page.

You can add icebreakers into the session to boost energy, after the break can be a good time for this.

High to low

Ask the group organise themselves in order, start off with quick easy ones like height or birthday and then move onto some that involve more conversation, you could even theme them for the workshop you are running.

E.g. for the Academic Pressure Workshop, ask if they thrive under pressure, or prefer more time and preparation to complete an assignment. Ask them to place themselves in order from Less Pressure to Most Pressure.

Desert island

Ask the group what three items you would bring on a deserted island. Then ask them which three items they would bring on an Island paradise. Are they similar or drastically different?

Word Association

Ask everyone in the group to say the first thing that comes to mind when asked the word "health" and again with "wellbeing". Can start of with a less obvious word to encourage creativity e.g. "Tasty"

Visualisation

- If your day/ week was a film/ book/ song, which would it be and why?
- If you or your day/week/life were an animal/ character/ condiment/ meal etc, what would you be and why?

Lucky dip

Everyone in the group has to write out a random word, they then muddle the words up and pick one out at random. They then have to speak about this topic for 30 seconds to one minute. Can be used to represent how social situations might make it difficult for someone to communicate.



mentalhealth.org.uk

Facebook: [mentalhealthfoundation](https://www.facebook.com/mentalhealthfoundation)

X: [@mentalhealth](https://twitter.com/mentalhealth)

Instagram: [@mentalhealthfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/mentalhealthfoundation)

Mental Health Foundation
London. Cardiff. Glasgow.

www.mentalhealth.org.uk
+44(0)20 7803 1100

Registered Charity No. England 801130 Scotland SCO39714. Company Registration No. 23508466.

