



Quality Element 5: Health & Wellbeing

Supporting the Behavioral Health Needs of Youth

High-quality afterschool and summer learning programs foster positive behavioral health, which is “a state of mental and emotional being and/or choices and actions that affect wellness.”¹

According to the 2017-2018 National Survey of Children's Health, 24% of Georgia's youth aged 3 – 17 years had one or more mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral problem.² However, most of these challenges are not diagnosed and treated early on and there are simply not enough behavioral health practitioners with appropriate and specialized training available to youth and families in Georgia.³ High-quality afterschool and summer learning programs are an ideal, yet often overlooked, opportunity to support these youths via positive youth development.

Why is Behavioral Health Important?

Children and youth need nurturing environments to learn how to manage their emotions and behaviors in positive ways.

- Positive behavioral health increases a child's sense of well-being, supports healthy relationships, and enables children to achieve their full academic potential.
- Children with emotional and behavioral difficulties may experience major changes in the way that they learn, behave, handle their emotions, and interact with their families and peers.
- Without early diagnosis and treatment and without support from appropriate services, these difficulties can have an effect on their healthy development and carry into adulthood.^{4,5}

This requires a continuum of support throughout their development and in all learning environments – whether in school or out of school – and afterschool is a key part of that.

Why Out-of-School Time?

- **Supportive Environments:** Regular involvement in afterschool provides children with supportive environments where healthy habits are incorporated into their routine.
- **Positive Behavioral Factors:** Regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs promotes positive behavioral factors including positive decision-making skills, self-control, and self-awareness.⁶
- **Protective Factors:** Evidence-based afterschool programs offer protective factors that contribute to positive developmental experiences and improved outcomes for youth, while mitigating the effects of risk factors.^{7,8}
- **Prospects for Healing:** Trauma-informed approaches help youth overcome Adverse Childhood Experiences (traumatic events such as abuse, neglect, or violence that can affect a child's overall physical and behavioral health) and can reduce their chances of developing substance use disorders and other negative health issues.^{9,10}
- **Mentorship:** Youth have opportunities to learn from mentors and gain strategies for how to deal with strong emotions and are more likely to demonstrate positive behavior.¹¹
- **Opportunities for Growth:** Participation in afterschool has been linked to increased school attendance, improved work habits and classroom behavior, as well as gains in reading and math, and increased graduation rates.^{12,13}



Activities

Finding low-cost, quality resources for curriculum and activities to incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-informed practices into your programming can be a daunting task, but you don't need to be an expert or have a huge budget to have great activities. The following pages highlight some of the many great resources available and can be conducted by staff of any level.

WE FEEL FEELINGS IN OUR BODIES – SECOND STEP + CHILDHOOD 101

Grades Pre-K – 1 | Low Cost | [Download](#)



Young people will learn that our bodies can give us important clues about what we are feeling inside. Students learn how to check in with their breathing and heart rate while differentiating between comfortable and uncomfortable feelings. A short, free video episode featuring a Second Step instructor is available to guide the lesson [here](#). The lesson references [feeling cards](#) and includes discussion questions and book recommendations that facilitators can use with students.

Materials: Access to internet, a device to stream video, and printed feelings cards for each group of students

*Photo credit: childhood101.com

EXPLORING FEELINGS - CHILDHOOD 101

Grades Pre-K – 1 | Low Cost | [Download](#)

Young people will explore different types of feeling we all experience using printable feeling cards. Bonus: If you did the first activity featured here, you will already have these cards printed! Facilitators have eight different options to use the feeling cards as they guide students' learning about their own feelings and the feelings of others. Examples of techniques include guided storytelling, matching facial expressions to emotions, and a "Guess Who" type game.

Materials: Feelings cards

MANAGING DISAPPOINTMENT – SECOND STEP

Grades 2 – 5 | Low Cost | [Download](#)

Young people will learn how to identify feelings of disappointment and the importance of using positive self-talk to move through this uncomfortable emotion. Perfect for mid-to-upper elementary, the lesson includes discussion questions and a folded paper craft to remind students of their 3-step plan to counter disappointment. Discussion questions and a sorting activity challenge students to identify positive and negative self-talk. A short video episode featuring a Second Step instructor is available to use with the lesson [here](#).

Materials: Lesson Activity Sheet for each student, pencils, one sheet of paper per student for the craft, access to internet and device for streaming video

Activities

EXPLORING EMOTIONS JENGA GAME – CHILDHOOD 101

Grades 2 – 5 | Low-to-Medium Cost | [Download](#)

Students will explore a wide range of emotions, how emotions make us feel, and situations that may lead to experiencing emotions through a fun game of Jenga! Facilitators label Jenga game pieces with the list of emotions provided using three different colored sharpies. During Jenga play, young people who pull a piece listing an emotion must complete one of three tasks based on the color of the emotion word. Great activity for starting discussions and building empathy among students!

Materials: Jenga game set for each group, Sharpies in three different colors

WORRY WARRIORS – CRAYOLA

Grades 2 – 5 | Low-to-Medium Cost | [Download](#)



Young people will brainstorm common worries and create a Worry Warrior from common craft materials to “gobble up” their worries. After building their Worry Warrior, students brainstorm ways to conquer worries with courage. Questions include: What are things you worry about? Who can you talk to about your worries? Can you use positive self-talk or deep breathing to help when you feel worried? Books and poetry about overcoming worry are included in this lesson along with several adaptations for young people!

Materials: Construction paper, glue, markers, scissors, craft sticks, recycled box for each student (cereal box or tissue boxes are good choices)

*Photo credit: Crayola

PERSONAL PROFILES – CRAYOLA

Grades 6 – 8 | Low-to-Medium Cost | [Download](#)

Young people will explore symbolism and identity to create colorful silhouettes to describe who they are, what is important to them and what feelings they commonly experience. After the activity, students can share their work and build empathy and connection through finding commonalities between themselves and other students. Guided discussion questions include: Which silhouettes include references to hobbies? Which silhouettes contain similar colors, experiences, or words? What is something you learned about the person sitting next to you?

Materials: Heavy paper, pencils, overhead projector or similar strong light source for tracing silhouettes, colored pencils, markers, scissors

Activities

HIGH FIVE FOR GOAL SETTING – CRAYOLA

Grades 6 – 8 | Low-to-Medium Cost | [Download](#)



Young people will learn about how goal setting helps everyone to achieve success and explore their personal goals for the future. This activity will showcase the goals of members of the whole class in a colorful and personal way. Begin by engaging students with the following questions: How do you feel when you reach a goal? What feelings may stop you from working towards a goal (anxiety, negative self-talk)? How can you use coping skills to push yourself forward (deep breathing, talking to a trusted adult, using positive self-talk)?

Materials: Each student will need construction paper, crayons, kraft paper, markers, scissors

*Photo credit: Crayola

THE SHIELD OF STRENGTH – HOPE 4 HURTING KIDS

Grades 9 – 12 | Low-to-Medium Cost | [Download](#)

Young people will make a personal shield to highlight their own strengths in dealing with difficult emotions and identify other people in their lives who can be there to help when they need it most. Students can write personal skills and names of advocates who can help shield them when they experience difficult circumstances. Begin with a discussion about everyone's need for emotional support with the following prompts: Talk about a time you needed support (i.e., nervous about the first day of school or camp, a sick family member, loss of a loved one) with a partner. Allow 2-3 partner groups to share their answers. When you needed support, what helped you (i.e., talking to a trusted adult, positive self-talk, using talents and skills)? Students can use these conversations as a springboard for making their shield.

Materials: Cardboard or poster board for each student, scissors, markers or paint for decoration

THE MASKS WE WEAR – THERAPIST AID

Grades 9 – 12 | Low-to-Medium Cost | [Download](#)

Young people will decorate masks to compare and contrast the feelings and emotions they allow others to see and the ones they experience internally. This project encourages self-reflection and expression. Students are encouraged to think about how they present themselves to others (their self-confidence, identity related to school/sports/hobbies) as opposed to how they feel about themselves inside (talents they may not have shared with others yet, worries, fears). Discussion questions may include: What is one difference between the outside and the inside of your mask? What is one thing you are willing to share with the group about your mask (inside or outside)? Is it easier to share the outside of your mask or the inside? Why do you think so?

Materials: Paper masks (you can buy online or provide cardstock), scissors, markers, pencils, glue, magazines

[LINK TO REFERENCES](#)