



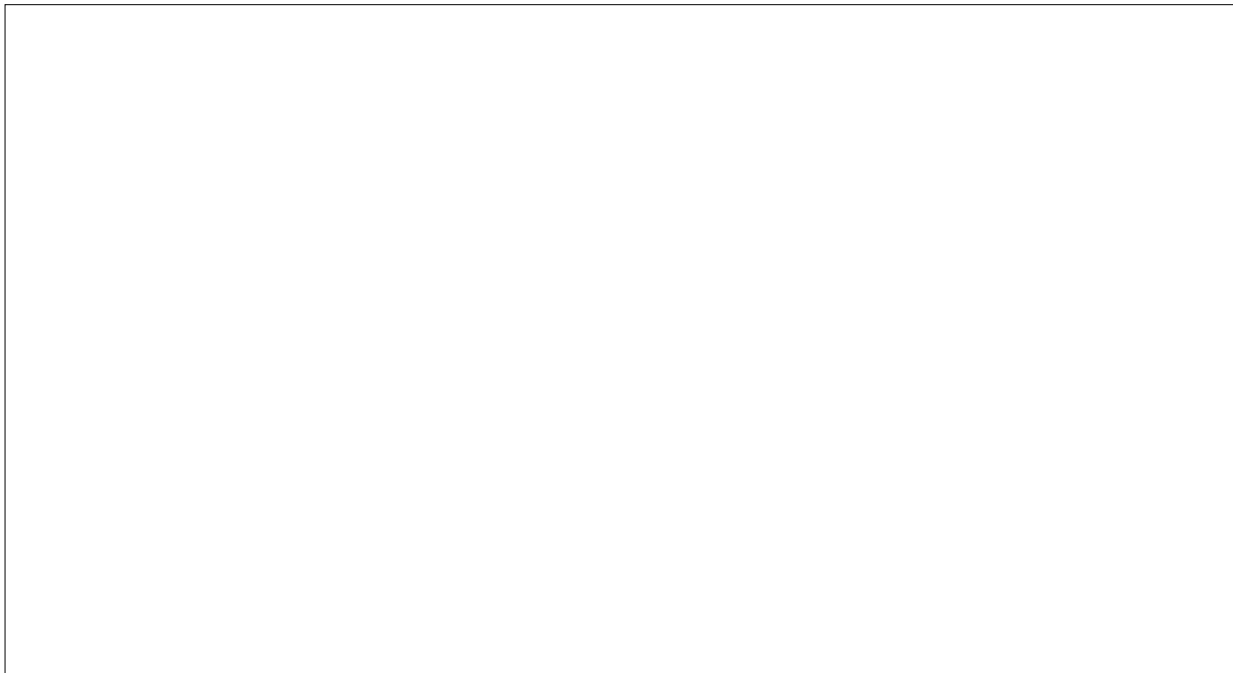
Student handbook

Before starting the workshop please complete the [Time 1 feedback form](#).

Workshop objectives:

- Increase knowledge and understanding of what mental health is, the difficulties faced and the support available.
- Increase the skills and confidence required to support a friend who is experiencing difficulties.
- Increasing knowledge of your own wellbeing and how to look after yourself.

Icebreaker:



Student mental health quiz:

1. What percentage of mental health problems are established by the age of 25?

2. What percentage of first year university students disclosed a mental health difficulty to their university in 2020/21?

3. In a survey by the Equality Challenge Unit, what percentage of student respondents who had experienced mental health difficulties had disclosed these to a fellow student?

4. What percentage of students said they felt lonely “most” or “all of the time”? (The percentage for the general population is 5%).

Sources:

EPI, 2018, <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/prevalence-of-mental-health-issues-within-the-student-aged-population/>

HESA, 2021, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c20051>

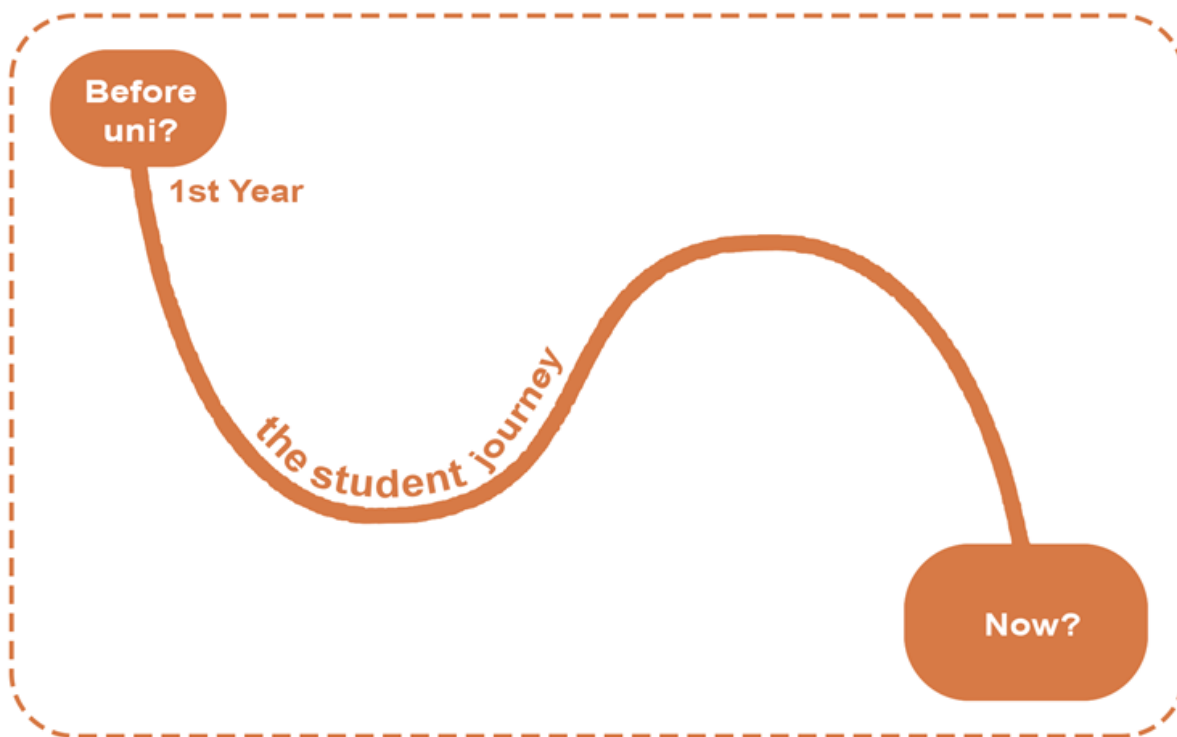
ECU (now Advance HE), 2015, www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/understanding-adjustments-mental-health/

HEPI, 2022, <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-Student-Academic-Experience-Survey.pdf>

For more information on the student experience, take a look at some of the research and reports Student Minds has authored by following this link:

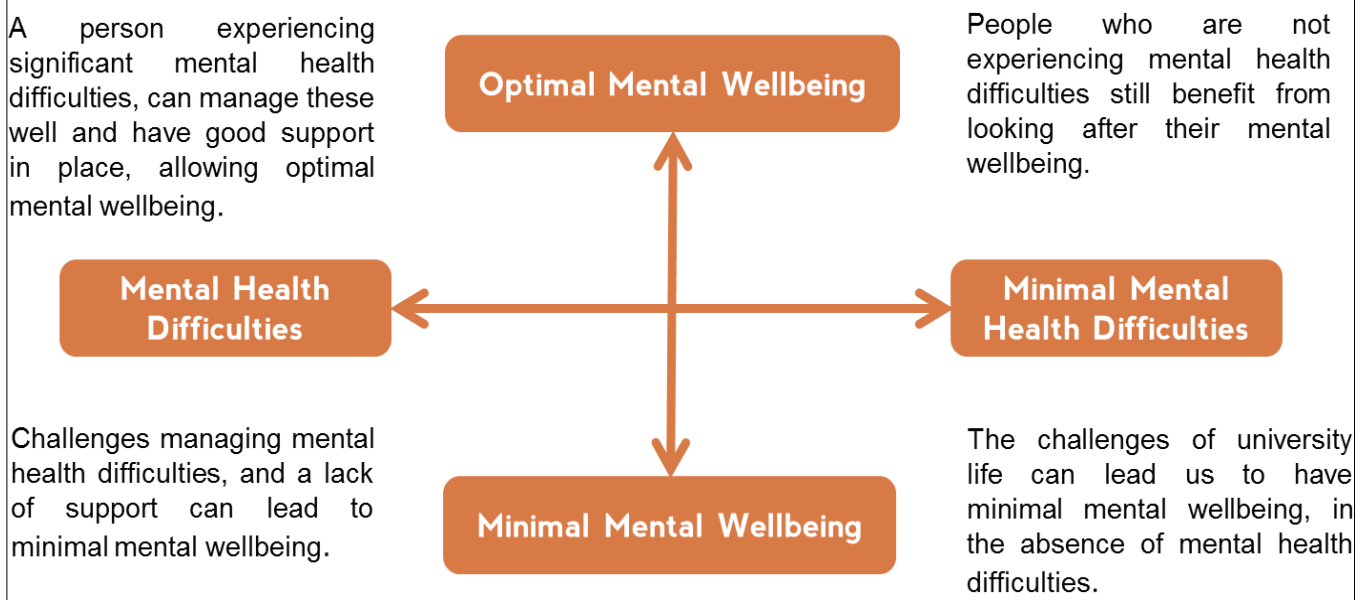
<http://www.studentminds.org.uk/researchandpublications.html>

The Student Journey



The mental health continuum

We all have mental health, and we all have mental wellbeing. The mental wellbeing of an individual can fluctuate and move around a continuum, as depicted below:



Should I be worried?

When people are struggling you may notice a combination of little changes in their behaviour, in addition to things they may say.

What behaviours would lead you to be concerned about someone?

Being a fixer or a supporter

Four points to be aware of:

1. Trying to tell your friend that they have a problem.
2. Arguing for the benefits of change.
3. Telling your friend how they need to change.
4. Warning your friend of the consequences of not changing.

Be wary of limited listening.

What do you want to do more of to be a better supporter? What do you want to avoid? Make a note of some key points for you to keep in mind here.

Notes:

This is empathy?

Watch the video 'This is Empathy' by Brené Brown.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evvgu369Jw

Starting a conversation

In this section we will look at how you might start a conversation with a friend. Although it can be a difficult conversation to start, it is valuable to let your friend know that you are worried and give them the time and space to talk, if they are ready. Some key things to think about include:

-
- Choose somewhere quiet without interruptions: You probably don't want people wandering in and out as this may make it difficult for your friend to feel comfortable enough to talk.
- Try to find enough time: Having a rushed conversation or finishing abruptly could leave them feeling upset.
- Find a neutral space: If you are asking a friend about their difficulties at their own home, this may lead your friend to feel uncomfortable, as they are unable to leave the situation if they would like to. They also may not feel able to ask you to leave.
- Do something relaxing: Sometimes it's easier to talk when the focus isn't on the conversation.
- Consider your boundaries.

Can you think of a suitable place and time to start a conversation with your friend/peer?

What if they say no/aren't ready to talk?

It may be that when you first try and start a conversation, you are the first person to express your concerns. This may take them by surprise and they may not be ready to talk. If they do brush it off and shut down the conversation, here are some top tips to keep in mind:

- Don't push the conversation and keep the door open. Let your friend know that you are there to listen when they are ready; you may have surprised them by bringing up your concerns and this could be the first time anyone has spoken to them about it. It may take some time for them to feel happy talking about it.

- Simply reaching out and offering friendship can really help someone to feel valued and supported.
- Do they know how to contact you in the future?

OARS: Active Listening skills

Active listening is a set of skills to help you listen and support. You can remember the skills by thinking of OARS. They don't all have to be used, or be used in a certain order, but each can be used at an appropriate time in your conversation with a friend. Write down what each letter stands for:

O
A
R
S

--

What is an open question? Give examples. Example: what can I do to support you?

--

What are the benefits of open questions?

--

When are closed questions useful?

--

Affirmations

Definition:

--

They only work if they are honest, and not read as patronising. When you provide affirmations try to:

1. Focus on specific actions, rather than attitudes, decisions and goals.
2. Think of affirmations as attributing interesting qualities to your friend.
3. Be encouraging!

Reflection

Definition:

This helps your friend to explore what they are going through, and allows you to better understand what it is they feel. When you are listening, your own perspective may cause us to emphasise some information or dismiss other elements. If you mishear, misunderstand or misinterpret, reflection gives you the opportunity to be corrected, and for the information to be explained further.

Reflective listening often involves using phrases such as:

Summarising

Definition:

Summarising demonstrates you have been listening, and will help both you and your friend digest and consolidate what you have spoken about.

Example:

- “You're not sure that you want to stay at university but you haven't spoken to anyone about this because you are concerned about the reaction you will get. At the same time, you feel that keeping this to yourself is putting you under a lot of pressure.”
- “Did I miss anything?”

Supporting change

Sometimes we know what we should do but don't have the motivation and confidence to make that change. Sometimes the change may be overwhelming with no clear stepping stones to get to the overall goal. For example, when someone is feeling down they may want to 'be happy'. By aiming for the ultimate goal it is difficult to see what steps need to be made to reach that goal.

Splitting the goal down into manageable tasks, and exploring any barriers getting in the way of doing them, can make us feel more confident and can help maintain motivation.

Exploring motivation:

- Explore the pros and cons of both changing and staying the same.
- Look forward: “What may happen if things continue as they are?” “How would you like things to be next year?”
- Ask for elaboration and examples: “Can you tell me a bit more about that?”

Building confidence:

- “How confident do you feel about making this change? What would make you feel more confident?”

- Look back: “What things have you done in the past that helped with this?”
- Explore goals and values: does the change they are contemplating help realise an important goal or value?

Make a plan/Goal setting:

- What change are they most ready and able to tackle?
- What is the smallest possible step they could take towards this goal?
- Ask them how they see themselves succeeding in this.
- Are there any obstacles to them achieving their goal?
- How could they manage these obstacles if they were to arise?

Each of these techniques will not be appropriate all of the time, it is about picking the technique that is most appropriate for the occasion.

Signposting

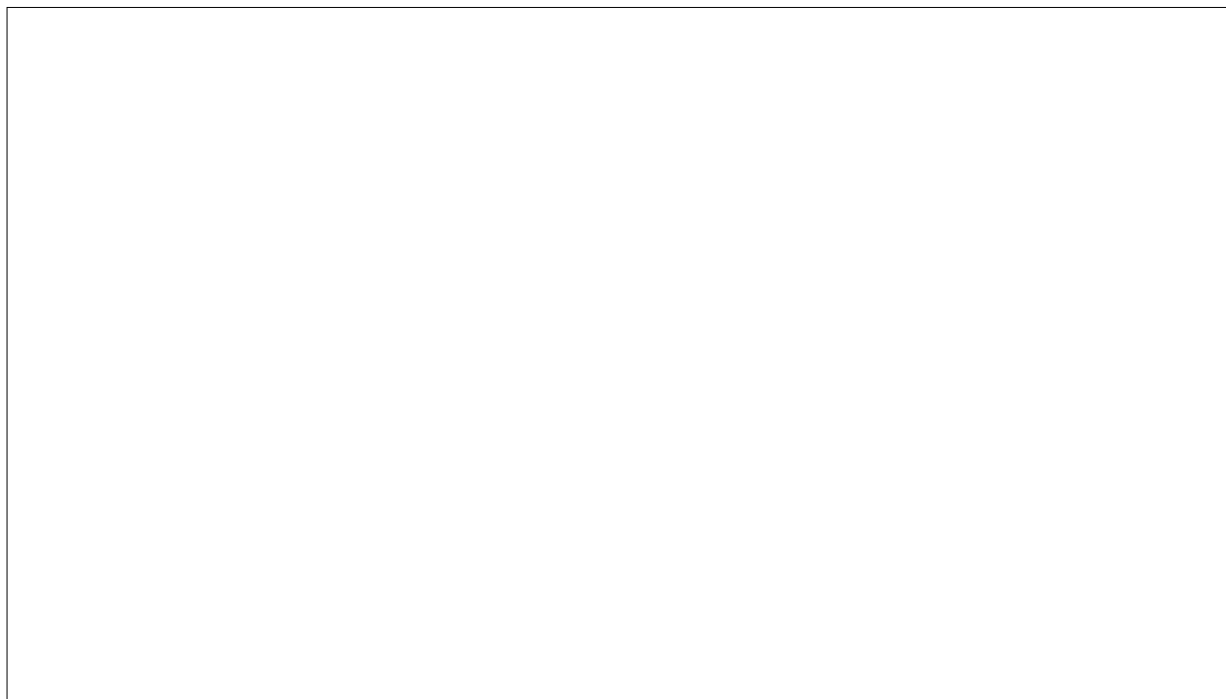
Knowing what support is out there:

It is useful to help your friend think through the support available to them, including professional help. Signposting is more than simply telling your friend about a service that exists - your OARS skills come in very handy here. To help motivate someone to feel willing and able to access further support, we need to encourage hope – explaining how services can be accessed, as well as why they could help.

- Student Minds website & Student Space - information about different support services available, including how to find them and what to expect when using them for the first time.
<http://www.studentminds.org.uk/supportatyouruniversityandfurther.html>
<https://studentspace.org.uk/>
- GP Service - can refer to specialist support and services.
- University Student Support Services, e.g. counselling, mental health advisers, student advice centre, Students' Union.
- Samaritans - phone 116 123, email jo@samaritans.org - confidential listening service
- HOPELine UK run by Papyrus- phone 0800 068 41 41, email pat@papyrus-uk.org - confidential service specifically for young people (under 35). They can offer crisis support for someone who is experiencing thoughts or feelings of suicide, as well as providing information and advice for those concerned about someone else.
- Nightline – student-run phone support running overnight. <https://www.nightline.ac.uk/>
- 999 - for an emergency situation.

- NHS 111 - Non-emergency line run by the NHS.

What support is available at my university?



Challenging situations

If a friend is going through a really difficult time, and they mention it to you, it's important to keep the conversation content hopeful and avoid rumination (this is the going over of symptoms and causes of distress rather than thinking about solutions). You should connect them to professional services and may want to help them:

- Talk to their GP
- Seek the support of a tutor or visit student services – remember the services are there for you as well!
- See if there's someone at home they can talk to
- It's really important to tell someone else if you are concerned about a friend/peer. You can speak to someone in student services or your accommodation if you are worried, and can always call the emergency services if you are ever really concerned. If your friend is going through a difficult time, they may find themselves feeling more irritable or anxious.
- Their behaviour doesn't reflect on you or your relationship. Try to separate your friend from any out of character comments or behaviours.
- Respect your own boundaries!

Establishing boundaries

It is important to have boundaries in place, both for your friend or peer, and for yourself. There are limitations to the support you can offer someone as you are not a trained professional, and you have your own studies, personal life and mental wellbeing to focus on.

Case study

"You are the only person supporting your friend, who is really struggling. You are now spending all of your free time supporting them. You are constantly worried about them and are beginning to fall behind with your studies."

Would you feel comfortable letting your friend know "I can't help right now?"

How would you let your friend know that you needed to step back?

What are the barriers to saying no?

What are the costs for you of not having boundaries in place?

What are the benefits for you in putting boundaries in place?

What are the benefits for your friend/peer in putting boundaries in place?

Putting boundaries in place could include:

- Having specific time that is for you:
 - "I really need to do well in this module, so I'm going to spend the afternoons in the library. It is really important for me that I do this."

- Encouraging your friend to build a wider support network:
 - “I’m worried that I’m not always going to be around when you need me, are there other people you can talk to as well?”
- Encouraging your friend to seek more support:
 - “It sounds like this is really difficult, I’m not sure if I’m the best person to help on my own. I wonder if we can also get someone else with more experience or expertise to help.”
- Putting your own priorities first:
 - “Thanks for texting me. Sounds like this is a tricky day. I really want to help. I have an essay due in tomorrow. Can we get coffee tomorrow afternoon?”

Maintaining your boundaries:

- Ensure you are getting support too: try to find someone separate from the situation (who doesn’t have a ‘gossiping interest’) so that you have someone to confide in and talk through any tricky situations or conversations with.
- It is ok if there are some things you aren’t comfortable talking about: if something like this comes up, you might suggest that they talk about this specific issue with someone else (and if they aren’t able to confide in another friend, you could suggest one of the support services listed in the Look After Your Mate guide).
- Remember that you’re not supposed to help with everything: encouraging your friend to try to solve their day-to-day problems can be really helpful in giving them greater confidence in their ability to cope, without having to rely exclusively on the support of friends.
- Have an alternative option: if you are having a tough week and you are not able to support a friend, make a plan to speak to them at another time.
- A modelling of good wellbeing: if you have been able to demonstrate to a friend that you can preserve your boundaries for your wellbeing, then that might be something that will nudge them towards looking after themselves.

Next steps

- Supporting a friend isn’t just about sharing worries and concerns – it’s also about keeping up with the things you enjoy, and spending time together as friends. Doing small things to show you care can really help to bridge the gap if things seem difficult.
 - ✓ Small gestures can be a big help. Send a text or bring them a cup of tea.
 - ✓ “What do you want to do?” can be a difficult question to answer if you’re struggling, so it’s good to be able to suggest a plan.
 - ✓ Keep inviting them along to events so that they continue to feel included in your friendship group.

Look After Yourself Too

As a friend, you are doing a wonderful thing by supporting someone. However, when you are supporting a friend, it can take considerable time and energy. Remember to invest time in looking after yourself. Be sure to keep up with your usual interests and relationships, remember that you won't be able to help with everything and make sure you are getting support too.

Here are some top tips from Student Minds: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qe0amYu3Nc8>



Wellbeing toolbox and Action plan

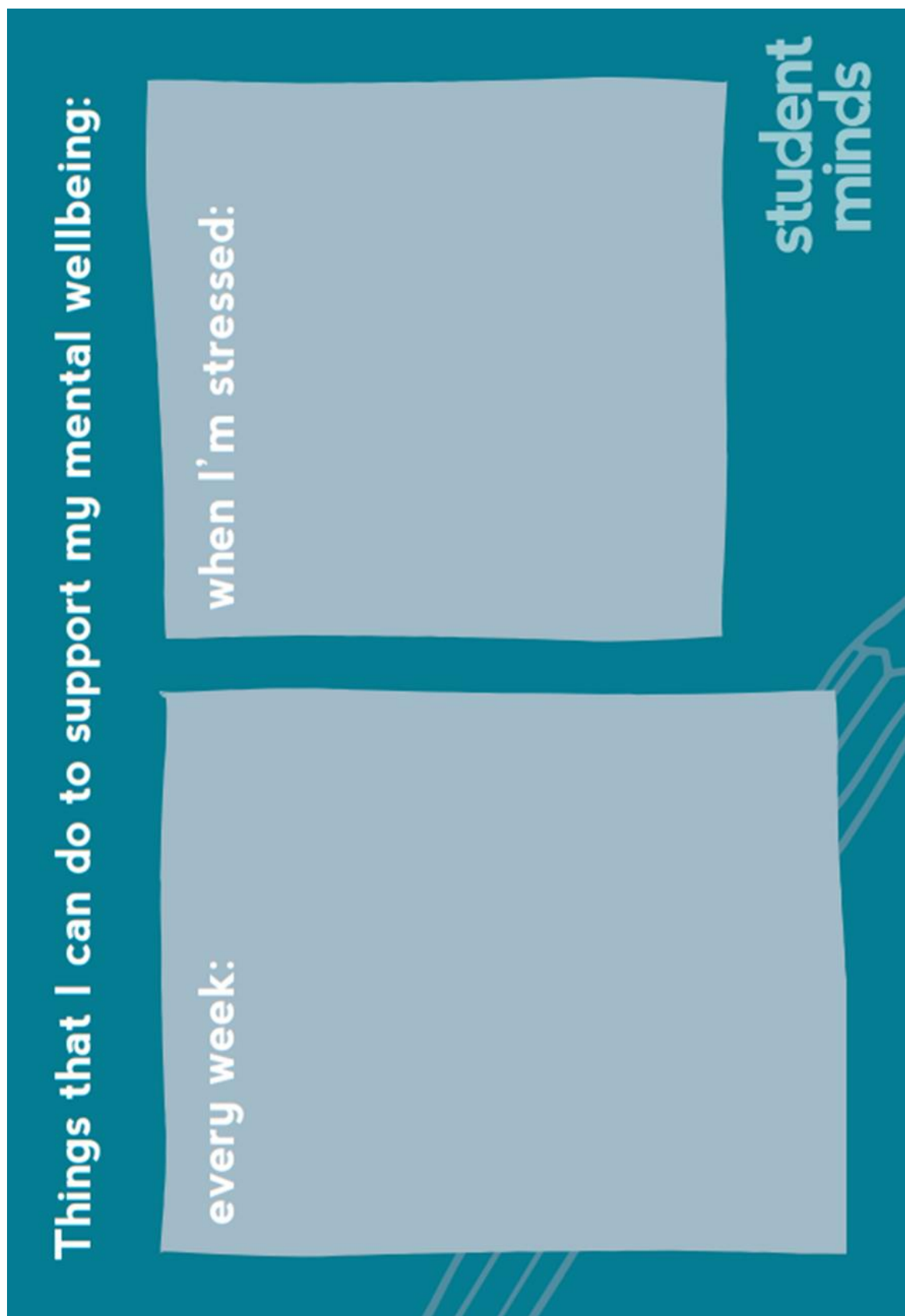
On the next pages you will find the wellbeing toolbox and an action plan outline. Fill in both of these in your own time.

Wellbeing toolbox; reflect on the activities/things you can do to support your wellbeing every week and when you're stressed. You may want to think back to the icebreaker to help with this.

Action plan; what are the key things you are going to do following this workshop? E.g. do you need to go onto your university website and look at the student support service pages.

Share on socials!

Thanks for attending the Look After Your Mate workshop, we hope you enjoyed it and please feel free to share your attendance on social media and tag us @studentmindsorg





Notes: