



The Creative Coping Toolkit

A year-long, multi-media program for social and emotional well-being, built around our Mental Health Trilogy

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Letter from the Filmmaker

Dear Educators,

Thank you.

Thank you for taking the next step in normalizing and destigmatizing mental health awareness and care. In creating the three films in our Mental Health Trilogy, *Angst*, *LIKE* and *The Upstanders*, our primary objectives are to give people hope, resilience and strategies to create positive change. This curriculum uses the impact of the films and focuses down on specific elements as drivers for long-term change, and we are so grateful to you for traveling with your students on this journey.

IndieFlix Education is proud to work with mental health professionals, specialists and educators who continue to inform what we have learned about anxiety, social-media addiction and cyber-bullying, as well as the strategies we can apply to combat some of their effects.

So, thank you, for all you do for children, and for all you will do for children by working through this curriculum with them.. We are honored to provide a way through some of these challenging issues for both you and your students.

— Scilla Andreen, CEO and filmmaker



About the Films

Angst is a documentary designed to normalize and raise awareness around anxiety. The film includes interviews with kids, teens, educators, experts, parents and a very special interview with Michael Phelps. Our goal specifically is to help people identify and understand the symptoms of anxiety, give them tools to manage it, and encourage them to reach out for help.

LIKE was created and inspired by the first film in iNDIEFLIX's Mental Wellness Trilogy, Angst. While Angst's goal is to raise awareness around anxiety, LIKE goes more in depth about the influence of social media on our lives. Social media is a tool and social platforms are a place to connect, share, and care... but is that what's really happening? The film brings perspectives from kids, adults, and experts to explain how social media use can affect our mental state, and the brain science involved in that impact. Social media is here to stay! The film and this curriculum teach us how to move forward in a world surrounded by increasingly sophisticated technology, that controls our thoughts and actions more than we think. Instead of instilling fears or pointing fingers at the social media platforms, LIKE's intention is to empower each of us to take control of how we balance out lives and shift our relationship with those platforms.

The Upstander explores cyber-bullying, showing the perspectives of those who bully, the effects on their targets and families, and the brain science behind it all. The film highlights new laws and programs that are already reducing bullying in schools and shows us how we can learn to make a difference together to create systemic change. Featuring interviews with experts, adults, and kids, the goal of the film is to teach students how to be upstanders, practice mindfulness, and be more resilient. Bullying prevention starts with individual behavior, so learning self-care and kindness will ultimately teach us how to be empathetic and stand up for others. You will receive access to the film as an anchor source.

Recommended Audiences

Angst, LIKE, and The Upstanders each explore a different aspect of mental health. They are rich with information and address complex and nuanced topics around mental illness, societal pressures, and emotional wellbeing. Topics such as anxiety, depression, isolation, and suicide are explored, and therefore, these films may be challenging for much younger viewers. This trilogy provides an ideal starting point for a variety of audiences and learners to begin an informed dialogue about the signs, symptoms, and treatments for mental illness as well as developing an understanding of the common societal triggers and pressures that result in anxiety and depression.



These three films, and the materials that accompany them, are recommended for middle school aged students and older, and can be used with young adult and adult audiences alike. They provide an opportunity for families, classroom educators, and community organizers to explore many important issues around mental health and self care, from strategies such as meditation and mindfulness, to the importance of mental illness, to tips for identifying warning signs in friends, peers, and even ourselves that it is time to seek help.

The films, when paired with the activities in this guide, provide an opportunity for classroom and community educators to explore all of these issues in the context of a number of traditional subject areas, including social studies, English/ Language Arts, health, media studies and media literacy, science, character education and conflict resolution, social-emotional learning, and psychology, just to name a few.

How To Use This Guide

This Guide was created with communities and students in mind and can be used in a variety of ways both in the classroom as well as informal educational settings like library events, family workshops, after-school programs, community events, or professional development sessions. To provide context, this Guide includes an “Introduction” section with some very cursory background information on the three films.

The “Films and Teaching Units” section includes 3 instructional units, one for each film. Each unit includes a framework for showing the film in its entirety, as well as a series 8 short activities that drill down into some of the important themes and topics that the film presents. Many of the activities can be done in a few minutes, and therefore the timing may be adjusted according to available time. Educators may want to teach all 3 films, or just one, or, alternatively, opt to select one or two of the individual sessions and teach just those. Because this guide is modular, and does not need to be taught from start to finish, educators have many options, and can easily pick or choose what works for them.

The section of Appendices provides additional content, including information about the experts in each of the films, alignments to curriculum standards, a short bibliography of additional resources, final interactive quizzes to wrap up the units, suggestions for culminating activities, and more.



A Brief Introduction to Teaching About Mental Health

These films – and this guide – do not endeavor to provide a comprehensive or exhaustive course on mental illness. But because they do address complex, and sometimes intense, topics around mental health, it is important to provide context, background, and have access to additional supports and resources if necessary. Therefore, in addition to the activities in this guide, we recommend exploring this supplementary resource from the Mental Health Coalition, *The Roadmap to Mental Health*. This Roadmap provides additional information about mental wellness, including language, behaviors, and treatment solutions that will help students understand the basics about mental health, and apply their learning to mental health topics.



In order to foster empathy between students and teachers, we recommend that as much as possible, the activities in this guide be peer led. To ensure success, we suggest reviewing some basic facilitation skills with students before allowing them to completely take leadership. Perhaps start a list on chart paper in the classroom, or in a shared google doc so students and educators can create their classroom or school code of kindness and core values in advance of the unit.

We also recommend students keep a journal (or digital journal) throughout the course to assist them with retaining information, and referring back to tools and strategies they might need. The journal will be helpful to empower students to make connections between concepts from the 3 different films. Reflection prompts are included at the end of each session to solidify student learning and give them the space to write down what particularly helped them.

A Brief Introduction to Teaching About Mental Health (cont.)

The following chart highlights some of the main learning topics that are addressed in each of the 3 films featured in this guide:

LEARNING TOPICS OF THE
MENTAL WELLNESS TRILOGY CURRICULUM

Angst

LIKE



- Anxiety: Symptoms, Exposure Therapy, Reframing Your Mindset, and Asking for Help
- Removing the Stigma of Mental Health & Wellness
- Brain Strategies
- Mindfulness Strategies
- Stress Management

- Self-Regulation of Technology and Social Media
- Cybersafety
- Mindfulness with Technology
- Healthy Relationships with Devices and Digital Wellbeing

- Bystander and Upstander Characteristics
- Resilience Skills
- Brain Chemicals for Happiness
- Mindfulness and Being Present
- Emotions and Language
- Fostering Connection

iNDIEFLIX
PRESENTS

Angst

RAISING
Awareness
AROUND
Anxiety

TEACHING UNIT

AngstMovie.com

About This Unit

The *Angst* instructional unit is planned in 8 standalone sessions. Many of the sessions can be completed in a few minutes, therefore, the timing can be adjusted according to each instructor's curriculum and available time. Each of the 8 group-focused sessions will focus on one aspect of anxiety, and will include follow up discussion prompts and suggested extension activities that students can complete on their own time. The first session provides pre-and post viewing guidelines to facilitate screening of the film in its entirety. The subsequent sessions go deeper into the various topics that the film raises.

In Every Unit

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

You may consider ways to tie this unit to curriculum content areas as well. Some ideas:

- **Science:** Learn more about brain chemistry and anxiety, and the cause and effect measurements of different strategies and tools to combat challenging emotional responses.
- **Social Studies:** Explore why we have fight or flight responses, and learn about the evolution of human survival, racial anxiety, and microaggressions.
- **English/Language Arts:** Read and discuss books pertaining to mental health.
- **Art:** Create an artistic or creative representation of feelings or moments of anxiety through the medium of choice.
- **Physical Education:** Look into the connections between exercise and mental health.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Amygdala: The amygdala is an almond-shaped set of neurons located deep in the brain's medial temporal lobe. Shown to play a key role in the processing of emotions, the amygdala forms part of the limbic system. Conditions such as anxiety, autism, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and phobias are suspected of being linked to abnormal functioning of the amygdala. (Science Daily)

Anxiety Disorders: As opposed to feeling anxiety, an anxiety disorder disrupts day to day life and prevents people from doing things they usually enjoy. Anxiety disorders occur when a reaction is out of proportion to what might normally be expected in a situation. The American Psychological Association (APA) describes a person with anxiety disorder as "having recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns".

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): the American Psychological Association (APA) defines CBT as a form of psychological treatment that has been demonstrated to be effective for a range of problems including depression, anxiety disorders, alcohol and drug use problems, marital problems, eating disorders and severe mental illness. CBT treatment usually involves efforts to change thinking patterns including:

- Learning to recognize one's distortions in thinking that are creating problems, and then to reevaluate them in light of reality.
- Gaining a better understanding of the behavior and motivation of others.
- Using problem-solving skills to cope with difficult situations.
- Learning to develop a greater sense of confidence in one's own abilities. (APA)

Exposure Therapy: APA defines exposure therapy as a psychological treatment that was developed to help people confront their fears. When people are fearful of something, they tend to avoid the feared objects, activities or situations. In this form of therapy, psychologists create a safe environment in which to "expose" individuals to the things they fear and avoid. The exposure to the feared objects, activities or situations in a safe environment helps reduce fear and decrease avoidance. (APA)

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES (cont.)

Fight-or-flight: The fight-or-flight response refers to a physiological reaction that occurs when we are in the presence of something that is mentally or physically terrifying. The fight-or-flight response is triggered by the release of hormones that prepare your body to either stay and deal with a threat or to run away to safety. (VeryWellMind)

Generalized Anxiety Disorders: creates chronic, everyday worry, sometimes consuming hours of a person's day. Can create physical symptoms of headaches and stomach aches.

Mindfulness: Headspace defines mindfulness as the quality of being present and fully engaged with whatever one is doing at that moment, free from distraction or judgment, and aware of our thoughts and feelings without getting caught up in them. (Headspace)

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD): an anxiety condition in which a person is plagued by unwanted thoughts, images or impulses (called obsessions) that he/she attempts to fend off or neutralize by performing compulsions (ritualized or repeated behaviors).

Panic Disorder: characterized by panic attacks and sudden feelings of terror that sometimes strike repeatedly and without warning. People experiencing a panic attack often mistake them for a heart attack because of the powerful physical symptoms including chest pain, heart palpitations, dizziness, sweaty hands, shortness of breath and stomach upset.

Phobias: we all have certain things or situations that make us uncomfortable or fearful. But a person with a phobia experiences strong, irrational fear over certain places, objects or events.

Prefrontal cortex: The prefrontal cortex (PFC) is the cerebral cortex covering the front part of the frontal lobe. This brain region is instrumental in planning complex cognitive behavior, personality expression, decision making, and moderating social behaviour. (Science of Psychotherapy)

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES (cont.)

Psychotherapy: MayoClinic defines psychotherapy as a general term for treating mental health problems by talking with a psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health provider. (MayoClinic)

Separation anxiety disorder: this is characterized by high levels of anxiety when separated from a person or place that provides feelings of security or safety. Separation sometimes results in panic symptoms. It is considered a disorder when the response is excessive or inappropriate after separation.

Social Anxiety Disorder: more than shyness, a person with social anxiety disorder has intense fear over social interactions, causing them to withdraw and not participate. Often people who suffer from this are very concerned about being judged.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

By teaching *Angst* in the classroom, you will enable students to:

- Identify and understand terms, definitions, signs, and symptoms of anxiety after watching the *Angst* film.
- Remember, vocalize and practice positive solutions to negative thoughts, negative self-talk, and worry.
- Feel encouraged to push aside subconscious perceptions of the stigma of mental health, so students can reach out for help, or to those around them who are struggling.
- Understand the relationship between brain science and anxiety.
- Use stress-management strategies to better help themselves and others with anxiety, including mindfulness, breathing, gratitude, empathy and basic exposure therapy.

UNIT OUTLINE

- **Session 1:** Screening Guidelines for viewing Angst
- **Session 2:** Slow Down, Refocus, and Remind Yourself of What Matters
- **Session 3:** Turn Negative Self-Talk Into Positive Action
- **Session 4:** Empower Ourselves Through Language
- **Session 5:** My Attitude is Gratitude
- **Session 6:** Managing our Worries
- **Session 7:** Confronting and Coping with Our Fears
- **Session 8:** Self Reflection Boosts Positive Momentum

SESSION 1: Guidelines for Screening the film *Angst*

OBJECTIVES

In this session, students will:

- Establish a shared vocabulary around anxiety, including a breakdown of what it means, as well as the language around it.
- Understand how anxiety might show up in their lives or their friend.
- Identify their own anxiety triggers.
- Workshop strategies to deal with anxiety-provoking situations.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Computer, monitor or other device for students to watch the film
- Access to the film *Angst* (55 or 43 minute versions)
- PDF of discussion questions

PROCEDURES

Before Watching *Angst*

1. Ask students to raise their hand if they or someone they know has ever felt the negative effects of anxiety. Ask the class what their response tells us about anxiety (e.g. that it's really common, that we need to know more to help ourselves and others).
2. Ask students to brainstorm situations at school that may create anxious feelings (e.g. :how they identify, being a minority, hard to pronounce first name, how they dress, classroom presentations, applying for college, grades, forgot to do homework, a big game, eating in the lunchroom, wearing a mask, not knowing if school is at school or at home, etc.).

SESSION 1: Guidelines for Screening the film Angst**PROCEDURES (cont.)**

3. Instruct students to write one anxiety provoking situation on a piece of paper and fold it up. Pass around a hat or bowl and collect all the pieces of paper.
4. Divide students into pairs or small groups. Allow each group / pair to select one piece of paper from the hat. Allow time for students to discuss in small groups, and problem-solve how to address these situations, to make it easier to push through in the moment.
5. Reconvene as a class and allow small groups / pairs to share what they discussed. Write down in the google doc some of the more common anxiety triggers and empathetic responses discovered and discussed in #4. Documenting this information will help imprint this information on the brain.
6. As a group, review the definitions from the glossary. Ask why it's important to understand these terms. Do they identify with any of the terms? Brainstorm ways to address anxiety, like take a break, reboot and jump back in. Think about ways to share the responses as an 'idea-bank' for all students. Possible answers: take a break from social media apps, go for a walk or have a stretch, cook something, call someone.

After Watching Angst

The following are possible discussion questions to guide a post-viewing conversation after watching *Angst*. Choose from the following questions, or create your own!

- What did you learn about anxiety from *Angst* that you didn't already know? What was the biggest takeaway of the film for you?
- Describe why you think it's so hard to talk about anxiety and our mental health when it is experienced in some way by every human.
- Is anxiety on the rise, or are we just more aware of it? What sorts of things could be triggering anxiety for us in modern times? (*Possible answers: social media, breaking news, negative self-talk*)

SESSION 1: Guidelines for Screening the film *Angst*

PROCEDURES (cont.)

- Share who you identified most with in the film, and why.
- Name some signs our bodies can give us when we are experiencing anxiety.
(Possible answers: heart starts racing, start to sweat, want to avoid/escape)
- Who would you contact at school if you or someone you know needed help?
- Share information about resources that the school or organization has in place to help.
- Identify who you go to within your friend group for support, and explain why you chose that person.
- Share ways you can support someone who experiences severe anxiety?
(Possible answers: Be patient, check in with them, be a good listener, offer to get help, tell a grown-up.)

HW/REFLECTION

Identify one piece of information you learned from watching the film. Describe how this information applies to your life, and share how you will hold yourself accountable for following through on some of the coping strategies you learned.

SESSION 2: Using Mindfulness to Slow Down, Refocus, and Remind Yourself of What Matters

OBJECTIVES

In this session, students will:

- Understand the importance of breath for self-calming.
- Learn to shift energy to the present moment.
- Identify ways to slow down negative momentum.
- Foster mindfulness through intentional listening.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Just your lungs!

PROCEDURES

1. Explain to the group that the following exercises are great for managing stress and anxiety. This activity helps us refocus our attention to the present moment by using our breath.
2. Start by modeling the “3 Breaths and 3 Wishes” exercise for the group. Show them how to take an intentional breath. Then, lead the group through the steps with you, noting anything that helped you along the way. Encourage the group to use these tricks whenever they need a quick moment of calm or a pick-me-up.
3. First: take a step back. If you catch yourself feeling overwhelmed, in your head, or funky, immediately stop what you’re doing and take a step back.

SESSION 2: Using Mindfulness to Slow Down, Refocus, and Remind Yourself of What Matters

PROCEDURES (cont.)

4. Then complete the following “3 Breaths & 3 Wishes” exercise. It only takes half a minute to find some calm:
 - BREATH 1 IS FOR YOU
Count to 4 as you inhale filling your lungs and diaphragm with as much air as you can. As you exhale, make a wish for yourself.
 - BREATH 2 IS FOR ANOTHER PERSON (FRIEND, FAMILY, PET, ETC.)
Count to 4 as you inhale filling your lungs and diaphragm with as much air as you can. As you exhale, make a wish for that person.
 - BREATH 3 IS FOR A COLLECTIVE, (FAMILY, CLASSROOM, COUNTRY ETC.)
Count to 4 as you inhale filling your lungs and diaphragm with as much air as you can. As you exhale, make a wish for the collective.
 - YOU’RE ALL DONE—CARRY ON!
3 breaths later and you’re on your way! You’ve changed your brain. Feel free to repeat at any point in the day when you need to regroup. Share this practice with others! It works
5. Explain to the group that they will be practicing another exercise that helps to quiet the mind and focus on a specific task. Explain that they can use this exercise whenever they need to focus their attention—whether it’s while doing homework, before a test, or before or after a big conversation.
6. Tell the class that they are going to practice another relaxation/mindfulness technique called a “Sound Scan.” This activity helps us to pause, reset, be still and practice mindful techniques by focusing on the ambient sounds around us.
7. Set a timer for one minute. Instruct the group to just listen. Have each student share the different sounds or one sound they noticed. How did this exercise make them feel?

SESSION 2: Using Mindfulness to Slow Down, Refocus, and Remind Yourself of What Matters**PROCEDURES (cont.)**

8. Explain that you will now set a timer for 2-minutes and 5-seconds. Once the timer is started, they should do the following
 - Close their eyes: use the first 5-seconds to settle the mind and close the eyes.
 - Focus on what they can hear: with closed eyes, turn the attention to the sounds around them. Take mental note of what they can hear: cars passing by, voices in the next room, birds chirping, your heartbeat, your breath, etc. Continue active listening until the timer goes off.
 - Reflect on the experience: once the timer goes off, take a moment (no more than a minute) to reflect on what you heard. If you're doing the activity with others, share amongst yourselves.
 - You did it – in 3 minutes, you shifted your energy and redirected your brain!
9. Use the following discussion questions to debrief with the group after they've completed these exercises. Choose from the following questions, or create your own!
 - How did the breathing exercises make you feel?
 - Did your body change and if so, how?
 - What were the effects of being still and listening? What sorts of things did it make you think about?
 - Where do you think using these techniques might be helpful?
 - How did wishing for yourself affect you? Did this change when you did it for other people? Do you think it changed how you felt or acted for some time afterwards? If you feel comfortable, share who and what their second and third breaths were for.
 - As a takeaway: explain the importance of breathing during stressful situations. How does it change the brain?.

SESSION 2: Using Mindfulness to Slow Down, Refocus, and Remind Yourself of What Matters

HW/ REFLECTION

Freewrite in your journal about how breathing differently changed how your body and mind felt. Note some occasions where pausing and remembering to breathe deeply could help you.

OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Challenge your students to practice one of these breath exercises once a day when they wake up or before bed. Remind them they can do this anytime they want.

- **Day 1:** Take a deep breath and make a wish for yourself
- **Day 2:** Take a deep breath and make a wish for someone you know
- **Day 3:** Take a deep breath for you and another deep breath for someone else. Don't forget to make a wish for you and the other person.
- **Day 4:** Take a deep breath for a collective (family, group, classroom etc)
- **Day 5:** Box Breath:
 - Breathe in for 4 seconds
 - Hold for 4 seconds
 - Breathe out for 4 seconds
 - Hold out for 4 seconds

SESSION 3: Turn Negative Self-talk Into a Positive Action Roadmap

OBJECTIVES

In this session, students will:

- Recognize when negative thoughts are starting to crowd into their brains.
- Realize that their own negative thoughts do not reflect reality or how other people see them.
- Learn and practice strategies for pushing back against the negativity by identifying and vocalizing actionable positive solutions to negative thoughts.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- A friend or classmate; or, if not available, a mirror
- Paper and a pen or pencil

PROCEDURES

1. Explain to the group that they will be engaging in an exercise that will help break down anxious thoughts to make them more manageable.
2. Elicit an example of one anxiety-provoking statement from the group and write it on the board or chart paper. Examples might be:
 - “I’m going to fail my math exam.”
 - “My girlfriend is going to break up with me.”
 - “I won’t have anyone to hang out with (at the party, at lunch, on the field trip).”
 - “I can’t do anything right.”

SESSION 3: Turn Negative Self-talk Into a Positive Action Roadmap

PROCEDURES (cont.)

- Then, as a group, select one of those statements, and brainstorm a Positive Action Roadmap to respond to it using the phrases “why” or “so what then?” Example:

“I think I’m going to fail the test.”

“Why?”

“Because I am afraid I can’t remember everything.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t feel like I studied hard enough.”

“So what then?”

“I fail and never get into college.”

“Why? It’s just one test!”

“True, I’ll give it my best shot.”

- Divide the group into pairs and instruct them to explore this exercise together. Tell each person in the pair to think of one negative thought – something that causes them worry or anxiety.
- Start with one member of the pair. Ask them to share their negative thought with their partner. Then, together, complete the following steps:
 - Take one deep, slow breath.
 - Count to 4 as you inhale filling your lungs and diaphragm with as much air as you can.
 - As you exhale, ask out loud “So what then?” or “Why?” and with your partner, allow yourself to actually come up with a realistic answer.
 - Write down the answer. Read it out loud.
 - Then, take another breath, and on the exhale, ask “So what then?” or “Why?” Again, write down the answer and read it aloud.
 - Repeat this process 4 more times. Doing so will help you rationalize those worst-case scenario/ slippery slope thoughts and regroup yourself.

SESSION 3: Turn Negative Self-talk Into a Positive Action Roadmap

PROCEDURES (cont.)

6. Allow time for the pairs to switch roles, and for the other person to go through the entire exercise.
7. Once every person in the room has gone through this exercise with their partner, reconvene as a whole group.
8. Explain that the goal is to reach one of the following conclusions:
 - **I'll be okay** → i.e. *the likelihood of what you're thinking about occurring or standing true is extremely low.*
 - **I'll learn something** → i.e. *perhaps this will be hard, but there is something to learn and grow from, even if what I learn is simply that I can handle this challenge.*
 - **I believe in myself** → i.e. *it seems impossible right now, but I believe in myself, my abilities, and those of the people around me – and I know that I can adapt when things don't go my way or I make a mistake.*
9. Discuss as a whole group. Use the following discussion questions to debrief with the group after they've completed these exercises. Choose from the following questions, or create your own!
 - What conclusions did you reach with your partner?
 - How did breaking scenarios down help remove the negative self talk?
 - Did it make it easier to move away from criticizing yourself or panic about things going wrong?
 - Share some of your roadmaps. Which ones were particularly powerful to you and why?
 - How might you be able to use some of these roadmaps in the future?
 - Who could you use to help you role play this technique when you're faced with real-life situations?

SESSION 3: Turn Negative Self-talk Into a Positive Action Roadmap

HW/ REFLECTION

In your journal, write down the scenarios and positive responses that you found particularly powerful from the Roadmap exercise. Focus on remembering that difficult situations are not usually as bad as you think they will be, and neither they nor any mistakes you might make define your worth as a person.

For Preview Purposes Only