



Teacher's Guide

to the Magnificent Mei
and Friends Comic Series

The bottom half of the cover features stylized, layered clouds. On the left, there are large, rounded yellow clouds. On the right, there are large, rounded blue clouds. At the very bottom, there are white clouds with a light blue outline. Three small white dashes are positioned to the left of the yellow clouds.

The *Magnificent Mei and Friends Comic Series* and accompanying *Teacher's Guide* were developed as part of the Helping Adolescents Thrive package, initiated by the WHO Departments of Mental Health and Substance Use and of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Aging, and the Maternal Newborn Adolescent Health Unit, Health Section, UNICEF.

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Note to teachers

Teachers are among the most influential people in adolescents' lives, with enormous potential to make a positive contribution to promoting and protecting adolescent mental health. Mental health conditions are among the leading causes of illness and disability for this age group, with suicide the fourth-top cause of death in people aged 15-19 years old. Given that half of all mental health conditions start before the age of 14 years, early adolescence represents a crucial time to intervene and prevent the onset of mental health conditions and promote positive mental health.

Teachers are uniquely placed to help students strengthen their social and emotional skills, and to assist them in learning about and caring for their mental health and well-being. These skills, combined with academic knowledge, will help adolescents more effectively navigate school, their relationships, their communities, and other occupations throughout their lives.

As the transition between childhood and adulthood, the adolescent years represent a window of opportunity for helping young people to recognize and manage difficult feelings, solve problems effectively, maintain healthy relationships, communicate needs and desires and make decisions that contribute to their well-being.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are committed to partnering with teachers to ensure that adolescents have the skills and support they need to thrive in all areas of their lives. The ***Magnificent Me and Friends Comic Series*** and accompanying ***Teacher's Guide*** are components of the materials developed under the ***WHO-UNICEF Helping Adolescents Thrive Initiative***, aimed at promoting and protecting adolescent mental health.

Both of us aspire to a world where all adolescents have a sense of well-being, believe in their abilities and are able to reach their full potential. We thank you for your support in helping make this a reality.



Henrietta Fore
Executive Director of UNICEF



Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General of the World Health Organization

Overview

Purpose

UNICEF and the WHO created the Magnificent Mei comic series and the accompanying Teacher's Guide to support social and emotional learning among adolescents. By promoting social and emotional learning and skills practice, the comic series and guide (which contains classroom activities) aim to help promote psychosocial well-being, prevent mental health conditions, and reduce risky behaviours in adolescents.

“Social and emotional learning is the process through which all people acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to manage emotions, develop healthy identities, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make healthy decisions.”¹

Social and emotional learning is especially critical for the positive development, well-being, and educational outcomes of adolescents.



Under the WHO-UNICEF Helping Adolescents Thrive (HAT) initiative, we tailored these open-access resources for use among adolescents aged 10–14 years to strengthen mental health promotive and prevention interventions.

For more information about the HAT guidelines, visit the website or click on the QR code below.²



- 1 Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 'SEL is...'; Chicago, Illinois, <<https://casel.org/what-is-sel>>, accessed 16 March 2021.
- 2 Guidelines on mental health promotive and preventive interventions for adolescents: helping adolescents thrive. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020 <<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/336864>>, accessed 16 March 2021.

About this resource

We developed the **Teacher's Guide** for use by professionals in educational settings who work with adolescents aged 10-14 years, including teachers, school counsellors, and mental health professionals, such as psychologists, occupational therapists, and social workers. We designed the guide to be reviewed independently or in a small group setting with other educational professionals.

Part 1

Key concepts (sections 1-3)

This section includes background information on mental health and well-being related to the general population and more specifically to adolescents.

Part 2

Essentials for teachers (sections 4-7)

This section reviews essential information on how to talk about and support adolescent mental health. We cover many topics, including communicating with adolescents, the teacher-adolescent relationship, teacher well-being, and how to help students who need additional mental health support.

Part 3

Lesson plans (sections 8-10)

This section includes short lesson plans and classroom activities for teachers to use with the comic series.

There is self-guided reading and reflection exercises in the first two parts of the guide. This is provided to help you to prepare to effectively guide your students through the short lesson plans, including classroom activities accompanying the **Magnificent Mei and Friends series**. In part 3, you will find content you can use to engage your students.

We created the **Magnificent Mei and Friends series** for young adolescents aged 10-14 years. Through a combination of images and text, comics can engage and shape students' attitudes by promoting empathy and critical thinking.³ As a form of storytelling, these comics present real-life scenarios and situations young adolescents may face in their everyday lives, making the content relatable and relevant. Seeing comparable experiences through fictional characters' eyes can help validate their experiences and let them know they are not alone.⁴ Combined with classroom-based activities and lessons, comics can be an effective tool to support students' social and emotional learning.

What the Teacher's Guide is not:

This resource is not a form of psychological care or treatment for a mental health condition. If you become aware of any of the following needs or circumstances, please consult a specialist promptly and ensure that the adolescent is referred to appropriate mental health and/or social care services:

- An adolescent who has a plan to end their life soon
- An adolescent who is struggling with an existing mental health or substance use condition
- If any protection needs arise – including sexual harassment, abuse, maltreatment, or exploitation

3 Hosler, Jay, and K. B. Boomer, 'Are Comic Books an Effective Way to Engage Nonmajors in Learning and Appreciating Science?', *CBE—Life Sciences Education* 10, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 309–317, <<https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.10-07-0090>>, accessed 16 March 2021; Rizkyanti, Charyna A., and Uswatun Hasanah, 'Correlation Between Reading Motivation and Empathy Among Adolescents in West Java, Indonesia', *Advanced Science Letters* 24, no. 1 (January 2018): 571-573(3), <doi.org/10.1166/asl.2018.12073>, accessed 16 March 2021; Nidhom, Ahmad M., et al., 'Markerless Augmented Reality (MAR) through Learning Comics to Improve Student Metacognitive Ability', 2019 International Conference on Electrical, Electronics and Information Engineering, Denpasar, Indonesia, 2019: 201-205, <doi: 10.1109/ICEEIE47180.2019.8981411>, access 16 March 2021.

4 Gavigan, Karen. 'Caring through Comics—Graphic Novels and Bibliotherapy for Grades 6-12', *Knowledge Quest* 40, issue 5 (May/June 2012): 78-80, <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1032543822?fromopenview=true&pq-origsite=gscholar>>, accessed 16 March 2021.

Some adolescents who are experiencing declining mental health or high distress may do any of the following:

- Feel very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks
- Try to harm oneself or make plans to do so
- Experience sudden, overwhelming fear for no reason, which sometimes includes a racing heart or fast breathing
- Engage in fights or express a desire to hurt others
- Have out-of-control behaviour that can hurt oneself or others
- Throw up, not eat, or other ways to make oneself lose weight
- Have intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities
- Have extreme difficulty concentrating or staying still, which puts the student in physical danger or causes problems in the classroom
- Use drugs or alcohol
- Have severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Show drastic changes in behaviour or personality



The Teacher's Guide does not provide the training and knowledge needed for you to provide counselling, treatment, or more specialized mental health services to adolescents. It is important to seek additional help if you identify students who seem to be experiencing difficulties with their mental health.

Key concepts

We created this section to provide you with information about mental health (in a general sense and, more specifically, in terms of adolescents) and space for self-reflection.

Understanding mental health

Too often, mental health is a misunderstood topic, surrounded by misconceptions and negative stereotypes. This can lead to stigma and discrimination, and often the person is less likely to get the help and support they need. Our personal biases can influence how we talk about mental health in the classroom, what we do and don't teach about mental health, how we perceive our student's mental health needs, and our expectations of our students.

Examining our mental health perspectives is a good starting point for promoting positive mental health among our students.

The questions below can be used to guide self-reflection or a small group discussion. You may want to keep a pen or pencil and a piece of paper nearby so you can write down your responses to the questions.

Exercise for self-reflection or a small group discussion

- How would you define mental health?
- When your mental health is good, what does that look like for you?
- What does it mean you can do?
- What does it mean you can feel?

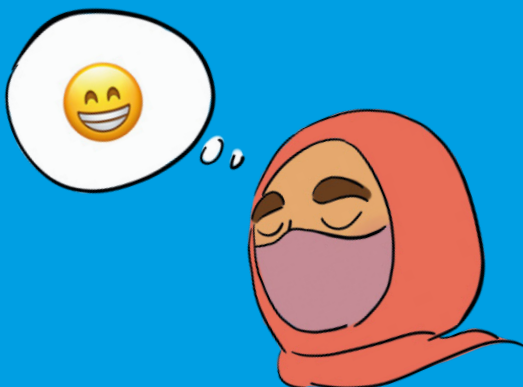
Everyone needs to take care of their mental health. Mental health is essential to our overall well-being and is as important as physical health. When we feel mentally well, we can work productively, enjoy our free time, and contribute actively to our communities.



According to the WHO
someone has good mental health when they can:

- realize their abilities,
- cope with the normal stresses of life,
- work productively, and
- contribute to their community.

Mental health conditions include a broad range of mental health problems with different symptoms. They are generally characterised by a combination of difficulties with our thoughts, emotions, behaviours, relationships with others, and capacity to do daily activities.⁵



⁵ Mental health (Fact sheet). Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019 <<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>>, accessed 16 March 2021.

Myths and facts about mental health

Here are some common misconceptions about mental health. Dispelling myths can help break the stigma and create a culture that encourages people of any age to seek support when they need it.

Myth	Fact
If a person has a mental health condition, it means the person has low intelligence.	Mental illness, like physical illness, can affect anyone regardless of intelligence, social class, or income level.
You only need to take care of your mental health if you have a mental health condition.	Everyone has mental health and can benefit from taking active steps to promote their well-being and improve their mental health. Similarly, everyone can take active steps and engage in healthy habits to optimize their physical health.
Poor mental health is not a big issue for teenagers. They just have mood swings caused by hormonal fluctuations and act out due to a desire for attention.	Teenagers often have mood swings, but that does not mean adolescent mental health is not real. Fourteen percent of the world's adolescents experience mental ill-health. Globally, among those aged 10-15, self-harm is the fifth leading cause of death. ⁶ Half of all mental health conditions start by the age of 14.
Nothing can be done to protect people from developing mental health conditions.	Many factors can protect people from developing mental health conditions, including learning social and emotional skills, seeking help and support early on, developing supportive, loving, warm family relationships, and having a positive school environment and healthy sleep patterns.

⁶ World Health Organization. (2019). World health statistics 2019: monitoring health for the SDGs, sustainable development goals. World Health Organization. <<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/324835>>. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO, accessed 15 March 2021.

A mental health condition is a sign of weakness; if the person were stronger, they would not have this condition.

A mental health condition has nothing to do with being weak or lacking willpower. It is not a condition people choose to have or not have. In fact, recognizing the need to accept help for a mental health condition requires great strength and courage. Anyone can develop a mental health condition.

Adolescents who get good grades and have a lot of friends will not have mental health conditions because they have nothing to be depressed about.

Depression is a common mental health condition resulting from a complex interaction of social, psychological, and biological factors. Depression can affect anyone regardless of their socioeconomic status or how good their life seems at face value. Young people doing well in school may feel pressure to succeed, which can cause anxiety, or they may have challenges at home.

Bad parenting causes mental conditions in adolescents.

Many factors – including poverty, unemployment, and exposure to violence, migration, and other adverse circumstances and events – may influence the well-being and mental health of adolescents, their caregivers, and the relationship between them. We should not blame parents if their adolescent children have mental health conditions. We should support them, as they play a critical role in their adolescent's growth, development, and recovery from mental illness.

Exercise for self-reflection or a small group discussion

- **Which myths do you feel are most common among your school and parental community?**

Your parental community may include other primary caregivers, such as grandparents and other family members.

- **Which facts did you find most surprising?**

- **What are some ways you can begin dispelling these myths in your school community and among your students?**



Adolescent mental health

The adolescent brain: A second window of opportunity⁷

Here are a few key concepts related to the adolescent brain:

Neuroscience tells us the brain goes through a rapid phase of change between ages 9-14. Early adolescence is a crucial period of brain development when challenges can emerge, including the initiation of risky behaviours, such as unsafe sex, substance use, and other unhealthy habits.

But it is also a time of opportunity when we can harness those rapid changes to set adolescents on a positive path. For example, building healthy relationships, engaging in learning at school, or establishing healthy physical activity and dietary habits can positively impact an adolescent's well-being now and in the long term.

Puberty initiates intense hormonal changes, and the brain forms faster, stronger connections, improving a teenager's ability to make decisions, solve problems, understand consequences, and gain more control over their emotions and behaviours.

The adolescent brain goes through a period of greater sensitivity to social evaluations and emotional reactions.

Adolescents also begin to seek out sensations, explore their identities and develop more social relations.

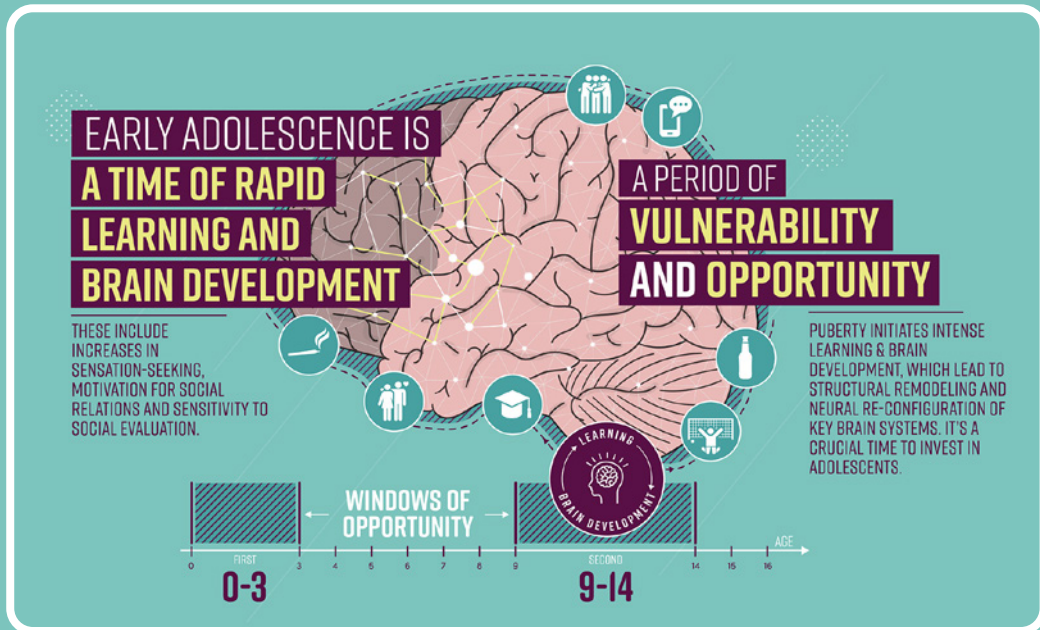
Teachers play an important role in supporting progress and learning during this period of rapid growth and development.

As young adolescents undergo these transitional experiences, they need support from parents, trusted adults, and schools and communities to guide them away from harmful, risk-taking trajectories and towards healthy exploration and learning.

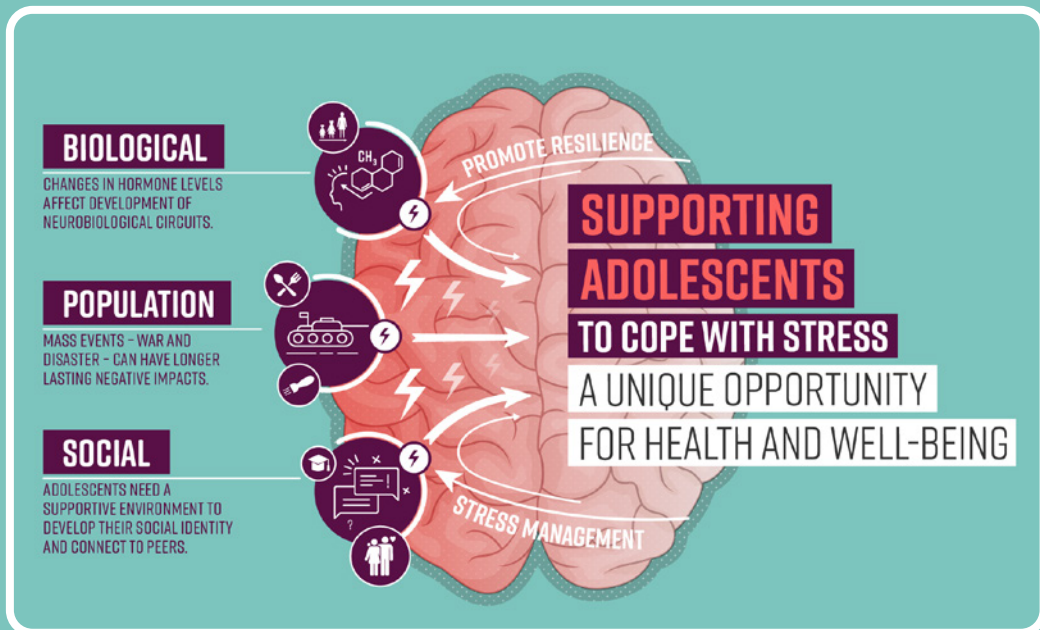
⁷ UNICEF, 'The Adolescent Brain', <www.unicef-irc.org/adolescent-brain>, accessed 16 March 2021.



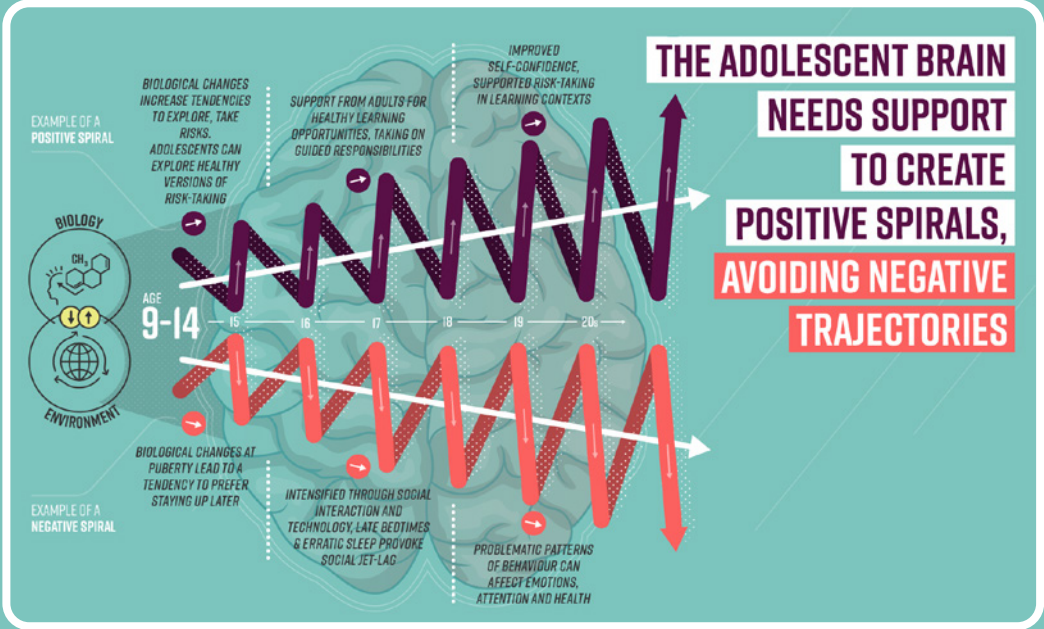
If you have internet access, you can watch the **UNICEF Innocenti** video overview on the adolescent brain.



Positive and negative spirals during adolescent brain development



The adolescent brain: a second window of opportunity



Adolescent brains are sensitive to stressors



Risks and protective factors for adolescent mental health

Various risks and protective factors can impact an adolescent’s mental health, including those within the school setting and those beyond the classroom. Being aware of what your students might be going through outside of school will help you better understand how to support them.

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Health and Environment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical illness Disability Pregnancy Alcohol and substance use (including tobacco) Personal history of maltreatment (physical or emotional abuse, physical or emotional neglect, sexual abuse, violence, or victimization) Orphan, refugee, or migrant background Poor relationship with primary caregiver Child of caregiver with mental health condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy self-esteem Emotional regulation skills Stress management skills Problem-solving skills Interpersonal skills Skills for refusing substances A healthy diet, physical activity, and sleeping patterns
Family	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stressed caregiver or one who is experiencing poor mental health Poor health or death of a family member Family conflict, domestic violence, or separation Parental incarceration Substance abuse Inadequate support from family income Household economic/food insecurity Harsh parenting (including parental criticism) Neglectful parenting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy communication with caregiver Family cohesion and support Sensitive, caring, and positive parenting Use of non-violent discipline Family structures and routine Parental approval Parental social support

School

Academic pressure and/or failure
Inadequate learning support
Bullying
Use of harsh punishment

School connectedness
Teacher connectedness

Community

Crime, gang, and interpersonal violence
Access to alcohol, drugs, and weapons
Poverty and unemployment
Limited support services
Potentially life-threatening situations, emergencies such as pandemics, or armed conflict
Harmful social and cultural norms and practices
Harmful gender norms

Strong community leadership
Social support and cohesion
Access to support services
Positive activities for youth
Responsive policing and law enforcement
Neighbourhood safety⁸

Peers

Bullying
Negative peer pressure
Conflict in relationships

Friend support
Positive peer relationships
Satisfaction with friends and/or romantic relationships

8 Lake, Lori, and Lucie Jamieson, 'Using a child rights approach to strengthen prevention of violence against children', *South African Medical Journal*, no. 106: 1168-1172, <www.researchgate.net/figure/Common-risk-and-protective-factors_tbl1_311951173>, accessed 16 March 2021; Samuels, F, 'Mental health and psychosocial service provision for adolescent settings', 2015, <www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Mental-health-and-psychosocial-service-provision-Samuels/e8331f575285d1b5c19b877d4a70c93f7e314b33/figure/0>, accessed 16 March 2021; Dooley, Barbara, and Amanda Fitzgerald, 'My World Survey: The first national study of youth mental health in Ireland', September 2015, <www.researchgate.net/figure/1-Selected-risk-and-protective-factors-of-adolescent-mental-health-in-MWS_tbl1_281590810>, accessed 16 March 2021; Dooley, Barbara, Amanda Fitzgerald and Naoise Mac Giollaibhui, 'The risk and protective factors associated with depression and anxiety in a national sample of Irish adolescents', *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine* 31, no. 1: 1-13, <www.researchgate.net/publication/272642270_The_risk_and_protective_factors_associated_with_depression_and_anxiety_in_a_national_sample_of_Irish_adolescents>, accessed 16 March 2021; O'Loughlin, K., R. Althoff, and J. Hudziak, 'Health Promotion and Prevention in Child and Adolescent Mental Health', 2018, <www.semanticscholar.org/paper/HEALTH-PROMOTION-AND-PREVENTION-IN-CHILD-AND-MENTAL-0%E2%80%99Loughlin-Althoff/c634401d6d1828e74b7f15f62642937f1261f395>, accessed 16 March 2021; Blum, Robert Wm, Mengmeng Li, and Gia Naranjo-Rivera, 'Measuring Adverse Child Experiences Among Young Adolescents Globally: Relationships With Depressive Symptoms and Violence Perpetration', *Journal of Adolescent Health* 65, issue 1 (July 2019): 86-93, <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2019.01.020>>, accessed 16 March 2021.

Mental health promotion and prevention

The HAT guidelines on mental health promotive and preventive interventions recommend universal delivery of mental health promotion and prevention interventions to adolescents.

Prevention focuses on avoiding poor mental health, while promotion is about improving mental well-being. **Prevention in mental health** aims to stop mental illness from happening by reducing an individual's exposure to risks and strengthening their ability to cope.

Mental health promotion increases the individual's exposure to protective factors by reinforcing their healthy behaviours and improving their psychological well-being. Promotion and prevention are overlapping, complementary activities.⁹

Learning social and emotional skills is recognized as one way to promote positive mental health and prevent poor mental health conditions. The HAT initiative supports **social and emotional learning, including emotional regulation, problem-solving, interpersonal skills, mindfulness, assertiveness, stress management, and the reduction of risky behaviours**. By engaging in learning opportunities and practicing these skills, you will be more equipped to help adolescents develop resilience and cope with life.

In addition to social and emotional learning and psychosocial interventions with adolescents, the HAT strategies also emphasize actions towards:

- Ensuring laws and policies are in place to protect and promote adolescent mental health, including providing adolescents with access to evidence-based promotive and preventative mental health interventions
- Ensuring that adolescents live, study, work, and socialize in supportive, healthy, safe environments that promote and protect their mental health and reduce their engagement in risk behaviours
- Ensuring that caregivers have the knowledge and skills to promote adolescents' mental health, healthy caregiver–adolescent relationships, and the support they need to protect their own mental health and well-being

⁹ World Health Organization. (2004). Prevention of mental disorders: effective interventions and policy options: summary report / a report of the World Health Organization Dept. of Mental Health and Substance Abuse; in collaboration with the Prevention Research Centre of the Universities of Nijmegen and Maastricht. World Health Organization. <<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/43027>>, accessed 16 March 2021.

For more information about the HAT strategies¹⁰



**HAT
Toolkit**



**HAT
Guidelines**

10 Guidelines on mental health promotive and preventive interventions for adolescents: helping adolescents thrive. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020 <<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/336864>>, accessed 16 March 2021.

Exercise for self-reflection or a small group discussion

- **What are two ways you feel you could contribute to reducing mental health risks among your students?**
- **What are two ways you could contribute towards positive mental well-being among your students in the classroom or at school?**

Essentials for teachers

Communicating with adolescents

Teachers play a crucial role in creating a safe, open classroom environment, which is particularly important for promoting positive mental health and communicating about this topic with adolescents. Before introducing the HAT social and emotional learning content, here are a few important considerations.

Build rapport

Establishing a connection and relationship with your students is the basis for effectively supporting their mental well-being and social and emotional learning.



Here are some tips

- **Show an interest in what is important to your students, and let them know you care about them.**
- **Share a bit about yourself, and find ways to make connections with them while keeping in mind that it is essential to maintain professional boundaries with your students.**
- **Ask them about their opinions, views, and perspectives, and seek to understand how they feel by putting yourself 'in their shoes'.**

Active listening

An active listener is engaged, caring, non-judgemental, and empathetic, even when (and especially when) they don't agree with others views or behaviours. While some of your students' beliefs or opinions may differ from your own, you need to respect and value their views. When we apply active listening, we can help students feel heard, understood, less alone, and calmer. By contrast, if we don't listen well, we risk making them feel as though we are brushing off their concerns and invalidating their feelings. This can leave them feeling defensive, frustrated, alone, or hurt.

→ **Show attentive body language.**

Maintaining eye contact, giving affirming nods, a look of concern, or encouraging smiles are all small gestures that let them know you are paying attention. Even without using words, you can communicate you are listening and that what the adolescent is saying is important.

→ **Ask open-ended, clarifying questions**

to gain a deeper understanding of how your students feel. These questions have no right or wrong answer; they simply help you gain insights into what your students think. For example, you could try any of the following questions: "Could you explain what you mean by..."; "Why do you feel you got upset when..."; or "How do you think you would have felt if..."

→ **Mirror what your student is saying**

by restating and paraphrasing what they conveyed. For example, you could say, "What I hear you saying is that..." or "Am I correct in understanding that you feel..."

→ **Express positive feedback.**

Giving specific immediate praise can help build adolescents' confidence and self-esteem and encourage them to continue those same behaviours. For example, if someone shares that they have been feeling very stressed, you could respond by saying, "Thank you for being brave and sharing how you're feeling right now" or "It can be hard to tell others when we are feeling stressed. Well done for sharing it with me."

→ **Validate what they are expressing.**

This can help teenagers accept their emotions and feel safe to express themselves. For example, you could say, "It's understandable that you're feeling so angry right now"; "Thanks for sharing that with me. It can be hard to share with others when we are feeling sad"; or "Sorry to hear you're feeling stressed. I would feel that way too if I were in your shoes."

Understanding the teacher-adolescent relationship

A positive teacher-adolescent relationship has been shown to impact a student's level of engagement, learning, and behaviour. It has also been recognized as an important factor in the mental well-being of adolescents. Here are two key pillars in the teacher-adolescent relationship that can impact your student's engagement with social and emotional learning content.

Maintaining clear communication and fairness

- Communicate sensitively and clearly with all adolescents about your role in helping them get support if you are concerned about their safety regarding any imminent risks, including whether or not they might end their own life.
- Communicating sensitively and clearly with all adolescents about your role in supporting them if they face any situations in which someone might be harming them.
- Communicate and engage with all students the same way.
- While delivering the lessons in this guide, you may learn some personal information about your student. This information mustn't bias your interactions.

Creating an emotionally safe space for learning

- Respond to student questions and comments with patience and respect to create an open learning environment where different experiences, opinions, and ideas are equally valued.
- When it comes to a student and a teacher, the person in a position of power is almost always the teacher. Consider this when delivering the lessons in this guide and make sure you do not force a student to complete any activities.
- Make sure the classroom is an emotionally safe space where students feel comfortable. Create a classroom that is nurturing and encourages learning. Students should only share what they are comfortable with – disclosing too much personal information may be more suitable for a different setting.

Exercise for self-reflection or a small group discussion

Think about how you might respond to the following scenarios:

Scenario 1

Imagine that while discussing the comic and short lesson, you learn that one of your students is experiencing strong feelings of fear and worry. You mark their test and give them back their results.

How might you consider responding?

- A** Change their marks, so they have a better score
- B** Say you have lost their test and do not give it back to them
- C** Give it back to them as marked
- D** Ask them to redo the test another time when they are feeling better

It is important that you treat this student fairly and sensitively but do not change their academic marks. You should give back the test to them as marked (option C), but you can also let the student know you are there for them and that together you can work through what feels challenging to them. Try speaking with the student in a confidential or private setting about how they might be feeling and how you might support them in easing their worries and fears.

Scenario 2

Imagine that while discussing the comic and short lesson, a student sits quietly and does not complete any activities.

How might you consider responding?

- A** Tell them they must complete the activities, just as you would if they did not complete other schoolwork.
- B** Tell them that if they do not complete the activities, there will be a negative consequence.
- C** Do not speak to them individually. Encourage the class to complete the activities.
- D** Do not speak to them individually. Encourage all students to ask you any questions about the activities.
- E** If the opportunity arises, ask the student individually if they would like some help with the activities, but do not force the student to complete them.

It would be best for you to respond by taking actions C and D. While it is useful to encourage all of your students to complete the activities and assist them with any difficulties, it is important not to force them to participate. You must respect a student's desire not to disclose information about the problems they may be experiencing.

Managing your own well-being

As teachers, you face many demands and expectations from your school administration, students, and parents. On top of this, teachers can carry stresses and burdens from their life outside of work just like everyone else. In the same way that it is important to protect and promote your students' mental health, it is also essential to look after your mental well-being.

Everyone has their own approach to maintaining their well-being; there isn't a one-size-fits-all prescription for taking care of yourself. Here are some mental health tips to consider for teachers, by teachers:

- Take time to regularly connect and have conversations with your colleagues and friends outside of work. Let people know how you are doing and feeling, and check in to see how they are doing. Having a good support network can have a significant impact on your mental well-being.
- Do something physically active to help your mental wellness and de-stress. This could be taking a walk, biking to work, or maybe doing some form of exercise or sport you enjoy. Anything to get your body moving can help.
- Celebrate your successes! Take the time to recognize any successes you achieved, no matter how big or small they may seem. Perhaps it's a moment of kindness, a breakthrough with a student, a good day in the classroom, or finally finishing grading those exams. A teacher's to-do list can be endless, but so can the positive impact you have on your students every day.
- Make time to do things you enjoy or that are meaningful or satisfying for you. Teachers work hard and are constantly giving. Your work often doesn't end once you leave the classroom. Making sure you have time for yourself during the week and on the weekend will make a big difference.
- Seek support if you notice yourself experiencing strong feelings of distress. Teachers often experience stress or emotional exhaustion from the intense nature of their work. If you find yourself struggling to keep up with daily activities or cope with everyday challenges, try to speak to someone you trust or seek support from your school administration, health facility, a place of worship, or even online.

Some available online resources include



WHO

Mental well-being resources¹¹



WHO

Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide¹²



IASC

How to take care of yourself during stressful times¹³

11 Mental well-being: resources for the public. Geneva: World health Organization; <www.who.int/news-room/feature-being-resources-for-the-public>, accessed 16 March 2021.

12 Doing what matters in times of stress: an illustrated guide. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020 Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

13 Voices of Youth, 'How to take care of yourself during stressful times', <www.voicesofyouth.org/campaign/mental-health-wellbeing-guide-how-take-care-yourself-during-stressful-times>, accessed 16 march 2021.

Exercise for self-reflection or a small group discussion

- **What is something you accomplished this week for which you feel proud or grateful?**
- **When was the last time a colleague or friend checked in to ask how you were doing?**
- **When was the last time you checked in to see how they were doing?**
- **When was the last time you did something you enjoyed or found meaningful or satisfying? Reflect on what the activity was and what effect it had on your mood.**

When to support your students in seeking additional help

There are times when you may notice changes in your students' behaviour, mood, or ability to function. Some of these changes may be related to usual developmental stages. Still, if these changes remain for a few weeks and interfere with their everyday functioning, it is important to seek help. Additionally, classroom learning and discussions about mental health-related topics can potentially trigger difficult emotions, thoughts, or behaviours in students.

If you have any questions or concerns about your student's behaviour or emotions, you should follow your school's protocol and/or speak with either a school counsellor, school psychologist, school social worker, school nurse, or principal.

If you notice one or more of the following behaviours in your student, you should consult with your school counsellor, school psychologist, school social worker, school nurse, or principal:

- Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks
- Trying to harm oneself or making plans to do so
- Experiencing sudden, overwhelming fear for no reason, which sometimes includes a racing heart or fast breathing
- Engaging in fights or expressing a desire to hurt others
- Out-of-control behaviour that can hurt oneself or others
- Throwing up, not eating, or other ways to make oneself lose weight
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities
- Extreme difficulty concentrating or staying still, which puts the student in physical danger or causes problems in the classroom
- Use of drugs or alcohol
- Severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Drastic changes in behaviour or personality

When supporting a student you notice is struggling with any of the above, be sure to give them assurance, encourage them to seek help, and ask them for permission to seek additional help. You can do so by saying things like:

- “It’s really good you told me about this. Together, we are going to get you some more help so that you don’t have to keep feeling like this. Would you be okay with that?”
- “I notice you haven’t been yourself lately, and with everything going on, that is totally understandable. I know someone I trust who could hopefully help you feel better. Would it be okay if we find a time for you to meet with them?”

If the adolescent refuses to give permission, you are still obligated to seek help, but you should carefully consider why the adolescent may be refusing permission and if there are any associated risks.



Teachers should follow the school’s protocol on informing and engaging with caregivers on any required student support.

Classroom lesson plans and activities

The lesson plans and activities in this section accompany the **Magnificent Mei Comic Series**. Here are some considerations for using the lesson plans:

→ Preparation

Please review each comic and its accompanying lesson plan carefully before teaching the lesson. Be sure to note any activities that require advanced preparation or materials and try to anticipate any participant questions.

→ Where

You can deliver the lessons in a classroom setting or any safe, comfortable space in person or online.

→ When

We recommend transitioning to these activities when appropriate to discuss mental well-being, such as at the start of the school day.

→ How

We designed the comics and lessons 1.1-1.3 to be delivered consecutively, as it fits your classroom schedule and curriculum.

→ Who

Students can review the lessons with the class as part of a large group, in smaller groups, or individually.



Being familiar with each short lesson's content and staying as close to the guide as possible will help ensure your students complete the activities based on the intended learning objectives. It can also help ensure that activities do not go off-topic or lead to extremely sensitive or difficult discussions.

However, as the teacher, you are best placed to make modifications based on time, cultural context, and other sensitivities of which you are aware.



Comic 1.1 Lesson

Learning objective

To strengthen an adolescent's knowledge about emotions.

Key messages

What are emotions?

What are the different emotions we may feel?

All emotions, including   , are okay.

Total time

25 minutes

Step 1

Introduction  5 minutes

Say

"Okay, everyone, we're going to spend some time learning about our mental well-being. First, let's start to think about how we're feeling right now. Feelings are our brain and body's natural reaction to situations that happen around us. I'm going to show you something called a 'Feelings Chart', and I want you to silently decide for yourself where you are right now on the chart. For example, I might think, 'right now, I'm feeling silly and excited.'"

Show or point to the Feelings Chart

This could be displayed or drawn in the classroom where all of your students can easily see it. While this chart is meant to include basic feelings, it is important to acknowledge that one can experience a wide range of feelings that may not be on the chart.

Say

"Would anyone like to share what they are feeling right now?"

Allow your students to share their feelings for 2-3 minutes.

Feelings Chart is a well-researched tool that aims to help children and adolescents identify basic feelings. It can help children and adolescents evaluate situations around them, build self-awareness, and connect their thoughts, feelings, and actions.



sad



worried



afraid



angry



happy



silly



excited



calm

Step 2

Comic book reading → 5 minutes

Say

“Let’s read a comic together.” Alternatively, you can ask the students to read the comic to themselves.

Read the comic book.

Step 3

Student activities  7 minutes

Necessary materials. If you are in the classroom, please be prepared to provide your students with markers, pens, or pencils, and a piece of paper. If you are teaching them virtually, ask them to have the supplies ready.

Say

“What do you think Mei might have been feeling as she packed her school bag? Use the Feelings Chart to write or draw her face. Draw or write down one clue from Mei’s facial expression, body, or self-talk that made you think she was feeling this way.”

Discussion questions

“Draw or write what Mei said, how she acted, or what facial expressions she used that tell us she was feeling a certain way. How is this different from how she felt after she talked to her grandmother? Share your thoughts with the person sitting next to you (or with the class as a group).”

Step 4

Reflection and revision of main concepts  4 minutes

Say

“Think about a time when you felt like Mei as she was packing her bag. What would you call this feeling? What made you feel this way? Would anyone like to share?”

Allow your students to share their feelings for 2-3 minutes.

Say

“Thanks for participating and sharing, everyone! Today we’ve spent some time learning about the different feelings we experience. All feelings can be helpful at different times, even the ones that are uncomfortable or painful to feel. It’s useful for us to practice and learn how to identify our feelings so that they don’t become too big or overwhelming. When feelings become too big or overwhelming, they can control how we act towards ourselves and others. If we can identify our feelings, we can also identify safe, healthy ways to manage them. This helps us have a better understanding of ourselves and the people around us. Any questions?”

Step 5

Practice  4 minutes

Say,

“Now I’d like all of you to draw an empty bag. Then choose a day (write this down now) to practice identifying what feelings you’re carrying in your bag and write or draw these feelings inside the bag. For each feeling, reflect on how much space it is taking up in your bag. For example, if you feel annoyed most of the day, you might choose to write or the word ‘annoyed’ or draw an annoyed face many times in the bag. You don’t need to show this to anyone else. It’s just for you. Any questions?”

You do not need to ask to see the outline or ask them if they completed it. It is up to your students to decide if they want to do it.

Comic 1.2 Lesson

Learning objective

To enhance an adolescent’s ability to identify how their emotions impact their body.

Key messages

Feelings can affect our bodies in different ways.

Total time

25 minutes

Step 1

Introduction  5 minutes

Allow your students to share their feelings for 2-3 minutes.

Start the session with the Feelings Chart activity introduced in the comic 1.1 lesson.

Step 2

Comic book reading  5 minutes

Say

“Let’s read a comic together.” Alternatively, you can ask the students to read the comic to themselves.

Read the comic book.

Step 3

Student activities → 7 minutes

Necessary materials. If you are in the classroom, please be prepared to provide your students with markers, pens, or pencils, and a piece of paper. If you are teaching them virtually, ask them to have the supplies ready.

Say

- "Using the Feelings Chart, what do you think Addo felt when he first saw his friends? What would you call this feeling?"
- Spend a few minutes drawing the face. When you're done, please hold up your drawing and look around to see what your classmates have drawn.
- If your pictures look different, ask them why they chose to draw Addo's face that way."

Say

"Draw an outline of a body. Then draw what is happening to the body when Mei sees her friends and feels worried about going to school. Be sure to include what could be happening to Mei's:



heart rate



breathing



brain/thinking



sweating/blushing

face, palms, underarms



stomach

butterflies, aches, knots



shoulders/neck/head

aches, pains, tension

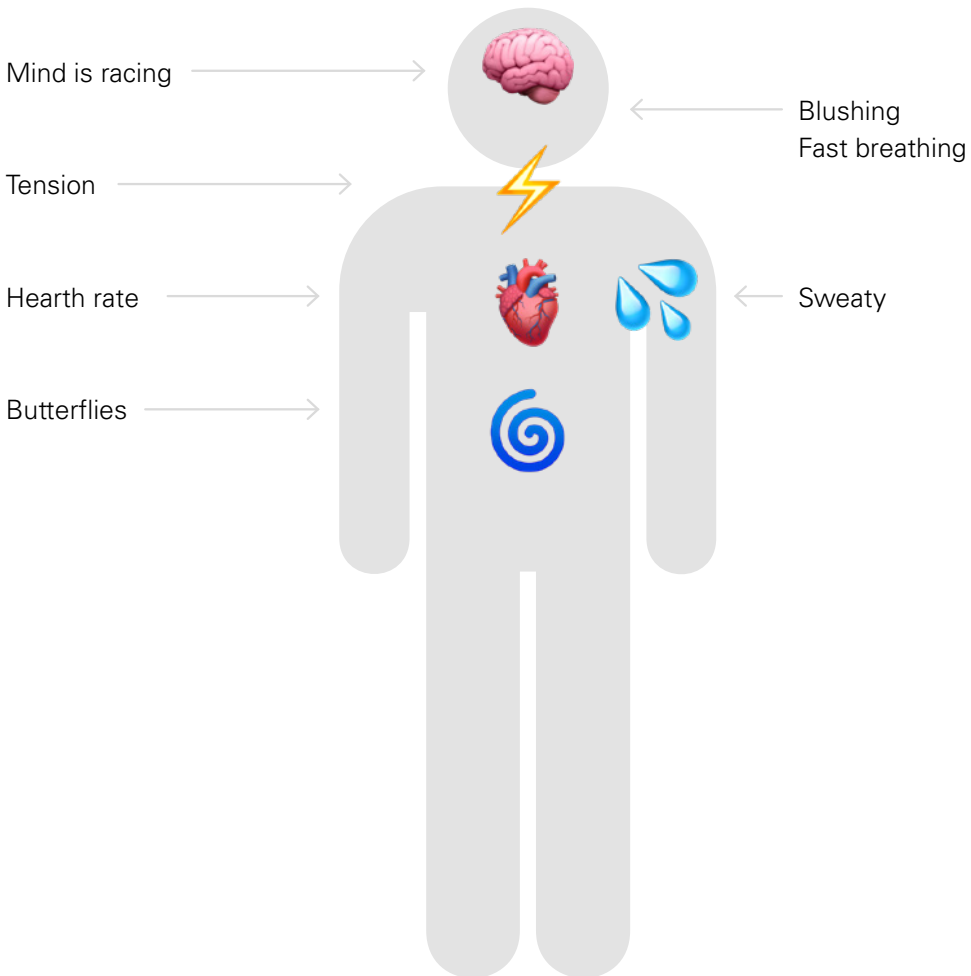
Say

“Once you’re finished, do the same for Addo.”

Say

“Can someone please explain their picture of Mei’s body? Can someone please explain their picture of Addo’s body?”

Here is a completed example for Mei (worry)



Step 4

Reflection and revision of main concepts → 1 minute

Say

Thanks, everyone! Today we've spent some time learning how different feelings can affect our bodies and brains in different ways. This is our body's way of telling us if we're feeling unwell and dealing with uncomfortable or painful emotions. It's useful for us to practice and learn how our bodies react to our feelings so we know why we may experience new things like our hearts racing, our faces turning red and hot, or our stomach aching. We also gain a better understanding of ourselves and the people around us. Any questions?"

Step 5

Practice → 4 minutes

Say

"Now I'd like all of you to draw another body outline. Then, choose a day (write this down now) to practice identifying what feelings you're experiencing and what you notice in your body. Then write and/or draw these inside the outline. You don't need to show this to anyone else. It's just for you. Any questions?"

You do not need to ask to see the outline or ask them if they completed it. It is up to the students to decide if they want to do this activity.

Comic 1.3 Lesson

Learning objective

To teach adolescents helpful ways to identify and manage their emotions.
To explore helpful ways to look after our mental and physical health and well-being.

Key messages

We all have mental and physical health, and it is important to look after both. It is important to practice and learn how to identify our feelings. Learning to be aware of how we feel is the first step to managing our feelings. We should always talk to a trusted adult when we feel we may need help managing our feelings.

Total time

25 minutes

Step 1

Introduction → 5 minutes

Allow your students to share their feelings for 2-3 minutes.

Start the session with the Feelings Chart activity introduced in the comic 1.1 lesson.

Step 2

Comic book reading → 5 minutes

Say

“Let’s read a comic together.” Alternatively, you can ask the students to read the comic to themselves.

Read the comic book.

Step 3

Student activities → 7 minutes

Necessary materials. If you are in the classroom, please be prepared to provide your students with markers, pens, or pencils, and a piece of paper. If you are teaching them virtually, ask them to have the supplies ready.

Say

“Looking back over the three comic stories we read, write or draw all the signs that Addo needed some extra help managing his feelings.”

Ask

“Can someone please share their ideas with us?”

Be sure to cover the following ideas if your students don't mention them:

- Finding it hard to get out of bed (more tired than usual)
- Withdrawal and avoiding friends (when walking to school)
- Loss of interest in usual activities (going to school and playing soccer)
- Difficulty concentrating and irritability
- Feeling sad most of the day, nearly every day
- Experiencing any of the above for more than a few weeks

These six signs are important for adolescents to recognize so that if and when they or their peers need extra help, they can reach out to a trusted adult. If these signs last longer than a few days, that is a strong indicator that the adolescent may need additional support.

Say

“We all need to look after our physical and mental health. Write or draw three things you do to look after your physical health. Then write or draw three things you do to look after your mental health.”

After a few minutes, ask

“Does anyone feel comfortable sharing their ideas? If so, please come and write or draw them here.”

Say

“Does anyone want to tell us more about a time when they tried these tips? Or do you see any new tips here that you’d like to try?”

Afterwards, please add the following tips if the students have not mentioned them:

Physical health tips	Mental health tips
Try to get the right amount of sleep*	Recognize how you are feeling
Eat regularly and try to make healthy choices about the food you eat*	Be kind to yourself
Stay hydrated and drink plenty of water	Do activities you enjoy and/or that give you satisfaction
Stay active – exercise!*	Connect with your loved ones
	Talk about your feelings with someone you trust
*This looks after your mental health, too!	Seek help from someone you trust or a professional if you feel stuck or overwhelmed

Step 4

Revision of main concepts → 1 minute

Say

“Thanks, everyone! Today we’ve spent some time learning about how important it is to look after our physical and mental health. It is important to recognize the signs our body and brain give us when we experience certain feelings. This way, we know when to ask for extra help from someone we trust or reach out to a friend who may need some support. This helps us gain a better understanding of ourselves and the people around us.”

Step 5

Practice → 4 minutes

Say

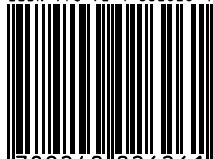
“I’d like all of you to write or draw three signs you notice in yourself when you know your feelings are becoming too big or overwhelming. What are these feelings? Then write or draw three things you can do to help. Be sure to include talking to someone you trust, like a trusted adult or friend. You don’t need to show this to anyone else. It’s just for you. Any questions?”

You do not need to ask to see the list or ask them if they completed it. It is up to the students to decide if they want to do it.

**Stay tuned for more
classroom lesson plans
to support the social
and emotional learning
and skills building
of adolescents at**

<https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/who-unicef-helping-adolescents-thrive-programme>

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