

FREE YOUR FEELS:

A Blueprint to Implementation





Table of Contents

2.....What is Free Your Feels?

4.....Get Started

6.....Waypoint 1: Free Your Feels Initiator

8.....Waypoint 2: Free Your Feels Builder

11.....Reputable Data Sources

12.....Waypoint 3: Free Your Feels Sustainer

13.....How to Create a Peer to Peer Program

16.....Congratulations!

What is Free Your Feels?

Free Your Feels (FYF) is a youth mental health awareness campaign that encourages Georgia's young people to explore their real feelings and share them fearlessly.

Watch this video to learn more!



Who Benefits from Free Your Feels?

Everyone! Specifically Free Your Feels targets school-aged youth, and adults who care for youth (educators, parents, faith leaders, childcare providers, etc.).

What are the Campaign's Goals?

Free Your Feels is a “from talk to treatment” campaign. The first step is to eliminate the stigma around talking about mental health, and ultimately knowing where to go for resources and/or treatment, if necessary. While you will set your own goals to achieve after implementing this campaign in your community, the overarching goals of the Free Your Feels campaign are:

1 To Speak: We want to empower youth to speak out and express their real feelings

2 To Listen: We want to encourage adults and peers to check-in with each other and listen judgment-free

3 To Connect: We want to connect everyone to resources for further guidance or help

Why Do You Need Free Your Feels?

Mental health is a journey. When you set out on a hike, you run into challenges along the way – tree roots, hills, rough terrain. With a few simple steps, you can prepare to overcome these challenges and make it to your destination intact.

Consider the following when thinking about implementing the Free Your Feels campaign in your school or community:

- How many young people are referred to counselors for mental health concerns?
- Has your community experienced the suicide of a young person?
- Do your young people express feelings of being overwhelmed?
- Is your district tip line receiving a higher-than-normal volume of calls?

The first step in this journey is evaluating these considerations and setting 3-5 goals on the outcomes you would like to see in your community by the end of the first year.

Examples of goals include:

- Implement a routine of performing daily two-minute breathing exercises during morning announcements.
- Reduce mental health referrals to school counselors by 10% by the end of year one.
- Share the Free Your Feels campaign and corresponding resources at 3 or more community meetings.
- Designate and create a Quiet Room at all elementary schools in the district.
- Establish a Peer-to-Peer Program at your local high school.

Success depends on how much progress you make in achieving the goals you set. By committing to bringing the campaign messaging to your community, **YOU** can help create a positive school culture that breaks the silence around talking about mental health challenges and/or concerns.



Implementing Free Your Feels today can change the trajectory of mental health in your community tomorrow.

Let's Get Started

You've set your goals! Congratulations! Now you're ready to grab your pack of tools and figure out which path to take.

There are so many ways in which Free Your Feels can be integrated in your community. "Feel free" to choose one option, combine a few, or do it all! It's important to remember that your mileage may vary, but this is **YOUR** journey!



CLICK FOR
RESOURCES

Read through the following waypoints (tiers of implementation) and pick one that works best for your time and resources. Check out the Free Your Feels website for mental health resources specific to audience groups. You'll also find toolkits with ready-made graphics and messaging to easily digitally market the campaign.

www.freeyourfeels.org



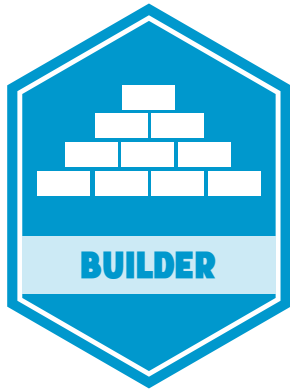
Free Your Feels Initiator

Free Your Feels Initiators are groups and organizations that may be limited in time and resources.

Waypoint

At this waypoint, Initiators will educate their communities by using pre-made materials. Your goal here is to raise awareness about the campaign.

> **Jump to page 6 for more details about being an Initiator.**



Free Your Feels Builder

Free Your Feels Builders have more resources and time than Initiators.

Waypoint

At this waypoint, Builders will empower young people, teachers, parents, administrators, families, and communities to utilize existing and new mental health resources.

> **Jump to page 8 for more details about being a Builder.**



Free Your Feels Sustainer

Free Your Feels Sustainers have plotted their trek and are ready to venture out on their own!

Waypoint

At this waypoint, Sustainers will take action and connect with their communities. Sustainers will be creating resources, engaging with youth, and organizing events to get youth and adults engaged with mental health.

> **Jump to page 12 for more details about being a Sustainer.**



WAYPOINT 1: Free Your Feels Initiator

As a Free Your Feels Initiator, you will spread the word far and wide about your campaign to improve mental health! This option doesn't require extensive financial resources or time. In fact, we have all the information you will need to be successful at this level.



CLICK FOR
RESOURCES

Want to start small? Share social media posts or print and display posters around your space (e.g., school, church, afterschool program). Want to step it up a notch? Present FYF to your community in meetings or through newsletters!

STEP 1: Set Your Goals

Set specific goals that would meaningfully spread awareness of the campaign in your community. What changes would you like to see? What do you think would realistically help the young people in your community? Keep these goals in mind as you start to implement the campaign.

Example goals could include:

- Display 5 posters in your building(s) to spread the word about the campaign.
- Connect 25 people to Free Your Feels resources, either by sending out a newsletter or by directly presenting to them.
- Share 6 social media posts about Free Your Feels in a 12-month period.

STEP 2: Plot Your Route

It's time to venture out and start marketing the campaign. Consider sharing information in the following ways:

- Use pre-made posters and flyers to spread the word about the campaign ([click here for these resources](#))
- Highlight existing resources, including:



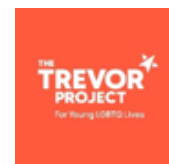
MyGCAL: 24/7/365 chat service for crisis support and dispatch of mobile crisis support teams



988: an alternative phone service to 911 that connects the caller to suicide prevention and mental health crisis support and services



NotOK App: a digital panic button that informs up to 5 people that you are "not ok" and you are alerting them to check in on you



The Trevor Project: 24/7/365 support and information for LGBTQ+ youth by trained counselors

Take a look at our Free Your Feels resources. We have a page [for youth](#), a page [for educators/professionals](#), and a page [for caregivers/parents](#) of children.

- Put information about FYF in your school or organization's newsletter

SAMPLE NEWSLETTER BLURB: *Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities and Voices for Georgia's Children, along with Silence the Shame and VOX ATL, launched the Free Your Feels (FYF) campaign to help Georgia's children, teens, and young adults stay mentally healthy by expressing their true feelings to peers, parents, teachers, and most importantly, themselves. The FYF campaign aims to shift the school climate and young people's comfort level in talking about mental health. The idea is to help create a positive school culture that breaks the silence around talking about mental health challenges or concerns. In addition, this initiative aims to empower youth to speak out and express their real feelings, encourage adults and peers to check in with each other, listen judgment-free, and connect everyone to resources for further guidance or help.*

- Introduce Free Your Feels to your organization (e.g., at staff meetings, assemblies, trainings, etc.)

- Use our [existing Powerpoint slideshow](#) to introduce the campaign:

Key message: *Free Your Feels is a mental health awareness campaign to empower youth to speak up and seek help from trusted adults when experiencing mental health challenges. It reminds people that service is available whenever you need support. In addition, the campaign normalizes mental health conversations and supports and promotes healthy living.*

- Share [this video](#) with partners and youth.

- Go viral! Spread the word about Free Your Feels on your social media platforms.



Best days to post: Tuesday – Friday
Worst day to post: Saturdays



Best days to post: Tuesdays & Wednesdays
Worst day to post: Sundays



Best days to post: Wednesdays & Thursdays
Worst day to post: Sundays



Best days to post: Tuesdays & Wednesdays
Worst day to post: Sundays

Reshare social content from the Free Your Feels platforms.

SOCIAL MEDIA BEST PRACTICES

- Always try to post a photo to grab your followers' attention.
- Use the hashtag #FreeYourFeels.
- Post frequently to keep your followers engaged.



STEP 3: Earn Your Initiator Badge



To earn the Initiator badge, you will have successfully spread the word about Free Your Feels in your community. Return to the goals you set to see whether you have succeeded in the Initiator mission.

- Have you displayed the number of posters you wanted to? Do youth in your community know where to go in case of mental health crisis?
- Did you present Free Your Feels to community members? Was the audience the size you hoped to reach?
- Have you shared the number of social media posts you had planned to?

WAYPOINT 2: Free Your Feels Builder

Free Your Feels Builders have more time and resources to implement the campaign than Initiators do. As a Builder, you will connect community members to services and begin developing mental health leaders and spaces. From sharing signs and symptoms of mental health challenges, to statistics on the frequency of mental illnesses and addiction, to personal stories from your community – Builders will implement a campaign that will most effectively reach members of your community.



STEP 1: Set Your Goals

How can you best develop leaders and spaces in your community? For the campaign to be effective, you need to make sure your action plan is meaningful and relevant to the people you work with. How do you think you could best build out resources that would help the young people in your environment? The more specific the goals you set, the clearer it will become for you on how to implement the campaign.

Example goals could include:

- Identify 3 young people in your community as Youth Champions.
- Ensure 2 Adult Mentors go through Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) training.
- Design a brochure with information on local mental health services and share at least 50 copies with community members.

STEP 2: Plot Your Route

Ready to jump in? As a Builder, your journey will be a little more in depth than it was as an Initiator. Here are a few suggestions:

- Implement activities found in the Free Your Feels Initiator waypoint
- Identify your Youth Leaders

These are your boots on the ground and in the classroom ambassadors for your campaign. These young people are most passionate about supporting mental health and will be driving the campaign forward as they know best what their peers in their communities need.

- Identify (or designate) 1-2 staff members or trusted adults to be Adult Mentors
These adults should undergo mental health or suicide prevention trainings to ensure they have the tools to support the youth in your community. Available trainings include:

- ☐ Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) training
- ☐ Question. Persuade. Refer (QPR)
- ☐ Sources of Strength (Peer Led Support Group)
- ☐ Georgia System of Care, which partners with various organizations to offer mental health trainings for youth and adults in the state

- Make the Free Your Feels campaign your own!

- *Tailor the resources provided to engage your school, community center, place of worship, or wherever your community meets. The goal is to find creative ways to convey your knowledge about mental health relevant to your community. This is a key step in reducing stigma and removing barriers to seeking help.*
- *Encourage your Youth Leaders to create images or slogans they feel will be effective. This can be done on social media or offline, like posters at school.*
- *Host a photo contest with incentives. Prompt entrants for submissions on how individuals "free their feels" or ask community members to depict certain feelings or experiences.*
- *Create brochures, flyers, and posters about when, where, and how to access help locally. Include relevant local data where appropriate.*

Piktochart offers a free version of the platform, available to everyone to create infographics. **Canva** is an online, free-to-use graphic design tool available to everyone to develop social media posts, presentations, posters, videos, logos, and more.

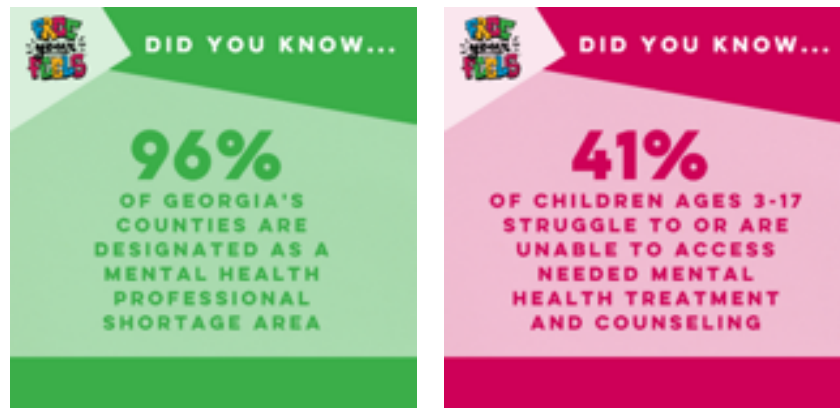
- Allocate a space, such as a room or part of a room, as a quiet room.

A Quiet Room or calming room is a sensory-controlled calming area. A Quiet Room is a room that offers a young person an opportunity to calm down during the day. The rooms are specifically designed to provide safe and secure settings for youth who may need "calm areas" or a "place to be" that will not harm them. They are not to be used for any sanctions, punishments, or disciplinary measures but as a voluntary space to regulate emotions.

- Commit to implementing a year-long social media calendar, using the pre-designed "[Year-long Social Media Calendar](#)".
 - For example, July is [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color \(BIPOC\) Mental Health Awareness Month](#)! Raise awareness by accessing data from the [Office of Minority Mental Health](#) and offer resources.
 - Download existing Free Your Feels monthly toolkits for further inspiration and relevant resources.
- Share local public mental health statistics and information.

There are several reputable sources in which you will find state and federal resources to access data. These data will illustrate the mental health experiences of those in your community. FYF can also provide guidelines on how to find good data.

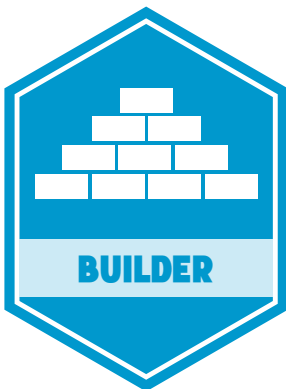
Some examples of types of infographics to share:



REPUTABLE DATA SOURCES

- [Georgia Student Health Survey Dashboard](#) displays data to see how Georgia young people responded to survey questions about school safety, school climate, peer and adult social support, bullying, mental health, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation.
- [OASIS](#) is a suite of interactive tools used to access the Georgia Department of Public Health.
- [Behavioral Health Barometer: Georgia](#) is a state-specific publication from SAMHSA that reports data on mental health and substance use for youth and adults.
- The [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\)](#) is the lead federal agency for research on mental disorders.
- The [Office of Minority Mental Health](#) is dedicated to improving the health of racial and ethnic minority populations through the development of health policies and programs that will help eliminate health disparities.
- [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) is the national public health agency of the United States.
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#) is the agency in the U.S (United States). Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) leads public health efforts to advance the nation's behavioral health.

STEP 3: Earn Your Builder Badge



To earn the Builder badge, you will have successfully developed youth and adult leaders to meaningfully implement the campaign in your community. Return to the goals you set to see whether you have succeeded in the Builder mission.

- Have you developed young people in your community into effective youth mental health leaders? Are there adults in your community who can effectively support the young people who turn to them?
- Have you shared the number of informational brochures you had planned to?

WAYPOINT 3: Free Your Feels Sustainer

If you have the people, the resources, and the desire to do more, consider being a Free Your Feels Sustainer. Get ready to venture out on your own! Sustainers will take action and **connect** with their communities by creating customized resources, engaging with youth, and organizing events to get youth and adults engaged with mental health. This community engagement can be a critical component for success.



SCAN FOR
RESOURCES

STEP 1: Set Your Goals

To become an impactful Free Your Feels Sustainer, you need to identify wellness goals specific for your community. How can you meaningfully make use of the leaders, the spaces, and the knowledge you have developed to effectively change mental health outcomes of your community? The goals you set here will determine the community outcomes and so we encourage you to set ambitious, yet feasible, objectives.

Example goals could include:

- Host peer-to-peer program meetings once a week for the duration of 6 months.
- Coordinate a 5k walk to raise awareness for Free Your Feels and share information about the campaign.
- Identify 2 community partners to collaborate with on an end-of-school youth mental health event.

STEP 2: Plot Your Route

- Implement activities found in the Free Your Feels Initiator and Builder levels.
- Establish a Free Your Feels Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Program.

P2P programs help schools and other organizations create a safer and more nurturing environment to help support youth's social and emotional needs and general well-being.

HOW TO CREATE A FREE YOUR FEELS PEER-TO-PEER PROGRAM

Young people often have an easier time talking to their peers. A P2P program is an invaluable resource because of this. If red flags appear, a staff member should get involved to offer additional support and resources.

STEP 1: Identify an Adult Sponsor

- Determine who the adult sponsor(s) will be; this will likely be the adult mentor already trained in mental health or suicide prevention.
- Commit to one school year with a FYF P2P Program.
- Identify and secure space for meetings and determine meeting dates and times, this will likely be the safe zone already identified in your community.

STEP 2: Identify Youth Leaders

- Youth leadership is instrumental in getting a peer-to-peer program off the ground; your youth leaders will most likely fill this role.
- Interested young people participating in the program must set and understand the boundaries of their role.
- The young people serve as not only resources for their peers but also can assist to design FYF school awareness activities around trauma, mental health, and suicide prevention.

STEP 3: Mental Health Supports

- Train youth leaders in YMHFA.
- Train sponsors/youth leaders on empathy, active listening, and basic social and emotional skills.
- Invite local mental health agencies to speak to the young people. (Do a lot of role-playing).
- Establish a referral system.

STEP 4: Begin Consistently Meeting

- Market your group's meeting date, time, location, and purpose.
- Meet regularly. Don't be discouraged if it takes a few weeks to get the group off the ground!

Considerations:

- Some peer programs can be implemented at a relatively low-cost and with minimal hassle.
- Effective youth peer-to-peer programs, while cost-effective, do require a deep investment by schools or organizations into training both the mentors and the adults who support them.

Remember:

A P2P program is strengthened by deep support inside the community

- Design your own Free Your Feels branded swag.
 - Use the Free Your Feels logo and brand kit to design your own stickers, water bottles, or other swag items to distribute and raise awareness in your community. Sharing promotional material will help to normalize mental health initiatives in your communities. You can also use these promotions to spark conversations and market the P2P group.
 - Need funding? Check out: [12 of the Best School Grants for Educators and How to Apply](#)
- Seek out formal and informal partnerships in your community

Informal partnerships can be as simple as getting a community organization to share Free Your Feels content on their social media accounts. Formal partnerships should have deeper involvement or engagement with the campaign and content.
- Drive the narrative and create headlines.

Reach out to your organization’s media contacts to get media/press coverage about the Free Your Feels campaign, why it is important, and how it is benefitting your community.
- Host panel discussions, town hall meetings, webinars, or educational events.
 - Note: these events may require a budget or sponsors to help manage costs.
 - Connect with your local behavioral health provider, Georgia Apex counselor, or school mental health professional to discuss mental health, warning signs of crisis, and how to access mental health resources locally.
 - Identify a topic to address specific to mental health, overall health, or stress management.
 - Be sure to have representation from various audiences (young person/student, educators, families, business/community leaders, mental health providers)
- Organize in-person or virtual awareness events and activities.
 - Coordinate various awareness events, such as:

	Art Contests		5K Walks
	Skits		Mental Health Awareness Fair
	Assemblies		

STEP 3: Find a Hiking Partner

- Identify key community leaders to reach out and invite to join the campaign.
Let them know about the goals of the campaign and how it will benefit the community
- Establish a coalition around the conversation.
- Convene your group virtually or in-person.
 - *Present Free Your Feels involvement opportunities to collaborators.*
 - *Provide materials and collateral as needed.*
- Ensure collaborators know actionable next steps and ways to engage in the campaign in your community.

STEP 4: Earn Your Sustainer Badge



To earn the Sustainer badge, you will have connected with your community and empowered the young people in your life. To determine the success of your journey, return to the goals you set and see whether you have truly ascended to the level of a Sustainer.

- Has the peer-to-peer group met as often as you had intended? Have the youth in your community found support and safety in the group?
- Did you host any educational events where community members learned how better to support the young people in their lives?
- Have there been any press or media publications about Free Your Feels in your community?



Congratulations!

We hope you feel confident, prepared, and excited to bring this campaign and its message to your community.

By choosing to Free Your Feels with those around you, you are starting the conversation and creating a support system.

Some final suggestions:

- Routinely assess the needs of your school or community, and ways you can have the greatest impact.
- Seek to spread awareness beyond your immediate sphere of influence.
- Stay in the know! Sign up for the Free Your Feels [listserv](#) to receive new resources as we release them.



@FreeYourFeelsGA

