# Peer Support Programs

*Friends Helping Friends*

Students with problems naturally seek out other students – and adults – whom they trust. Natural Helpers and Hope Squad are a couple of examples of programs that tap into an existing helping network to create a safe and health school environment.

## Health Youth Survey

In the 2023 Health Youth Survey, **30%** of students reported to feeling sad or hopeless in the last 12 months.
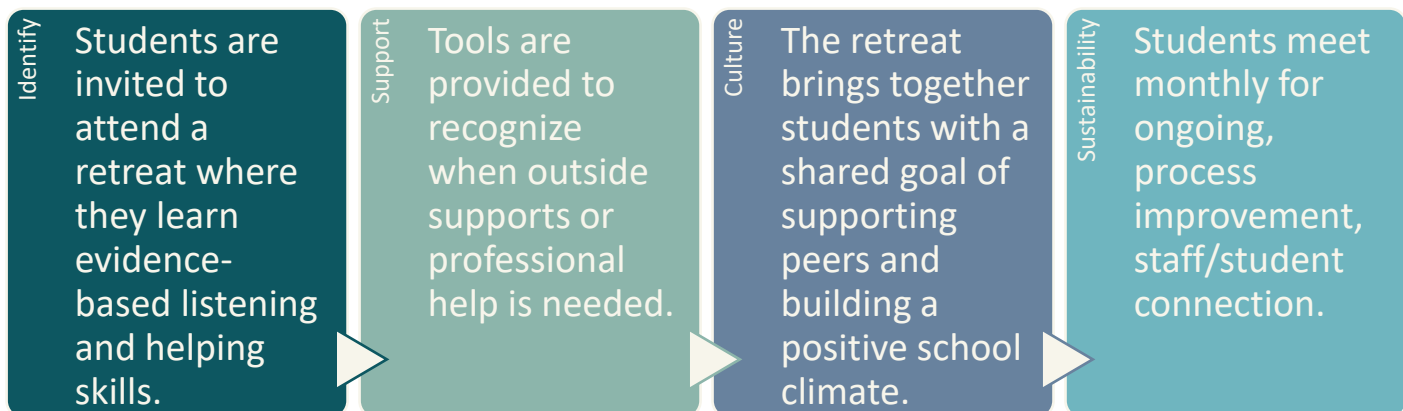
When asked who they would turn to for help when feeling sad or hopeless, an average of **50%** of students say their friend or peer.

## What Works

- Natural Helpers and Hope Squad identify the students who represent different subgroups through a school-wide survey.
- These students are nominated by their peers as someone who they trust and feel safe talking to.
- The power in these programs are the different students, in different grades are represented.
- Regardless of whether the student is top of their class or doesn't participate in extra-curricular activities, they can be a Natural Helper.

## Program Components and Roles of Natural Helpers

| Identify | Support | Culture | Sustainability |
|---|---|---|---|
| Students are invited to attend a retreat where they learn evidence-based listening and helping skills. | Tools are provided to recognize when outside supports or professional help is needed. | The retreat brings together students with a shared goal of supporting peers and building a positive school climate. | Students meet monthly for ongoing, process improvement, staff/student connection. |

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There are four important roles that student Natural Helpers may take part in. They are:

- Focusing on self-care first so they can be helpful to others.
- Improving the culture and climate of the school to make it more welcoming and inclusive.
- Helping friends work through everyday problems.
- Referring friends with more serious concerns to appropriate adult helpers.



As the pyramid illustrates, the majority of the Natural Helpers' work is proactive and directed at improving school climate and culture, as well as supporting friends. However, it is also important to provide a helping network that can respond effectively when students experience problems, and a system that refers young people with significant needs to the appropriate helping resources early.

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