

An Introduction to Natural Helpers Reimagined, 2026

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What Is the *Natural Helpers Model*?

At its core, *Natural Helpers: Reimagined* reframes a simple yet powerful insight: **students often notice peer concerns before adults do**, and young people typically seek help from people they trust—frequently peers—before reaching out to school staff.

The toolkit defines *Natural Helpers* as:

- **Peers and staff naturally trusted by others**, identified through an anonymous, school-wide survey.
- Individuals receive structured training to build skills in supporting classmates and enhancing school climate.
- Participants who serve as bridges to adult resources when concerns exceed their scope.

Importantly, the toolkit emphasizes that these helpers are **not replacements for counselors, therapists, or clinical staff**; rather, they serve as **complementary supports** and early connectors to professional help.



Figure 1: -Pyramid-of-Natural-Helper-roles

Why Peer Support Matters in Schools

Decades of research affirm that **peer relationships play a crucial role in adolescent socio-emotional well-being**. Youth are far more likely to disclose emotional concerns, stressors, or

experiences of bullying to trusted classmates than to adults. Peer supports models like Natural Helpers to leverage this existing social network, aiming to:

- **Extend the reach of support systems** beyond formal services.
- **Encourage early help-seeking and referral** to appropriate adults.
- **Increase overall connectedness and sense of belonging** within the school community.
- **Foster resilience, leadership, and empathy** among peer helpers themselves.

For school crisis team members, these objectives align with broader goals such as prevention, early intervention, and building multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Integrating peer support aligns with Tier 1 (universal) and Tier 2 (targeted) approaches by enhancing positive interactions and normalizing help-seeking behaviors.

Key Components of the Toolkit

The *Natural Helpers: Reimagined* toolkit is organized into **eight major sections** that support planning, implementation, and evaluation:

1. **Introduction** – Explains the model, goals, and conceptual underpinnings.
2. **Planning** – Offers tools for creating a leadership team and a year-long implementation plan.
3. **Selection** – Guides schools in administering the anonymous survey and choosing Natural Helpers.
4. **Retreat Training** – Provides sample agendas, activities, and skills instruction for initial training.
5. **Ongoing Training** – Focuses on continuity throughout the year with topics relevant to student needs.
6. **Lessons** – Includes structured content on self-care, school climate, and helping strategies.
7. **Activities** – Offers team-builders, icebreakers, and energizers for engagement. (*)
8. **Evaluation** – Helps schools assess program outcomes and collect feedback for improvement.

(*) **ACTIVITIES: CONNECTING BEFORE CONTENT** The **25 activities** in these three sections—Connecting Before Content, Energizers, and Trust and Team-Building—are designed to create a positive, engaging environment for Natural Helpers during training and ongoing sessions. Their purpose is to help participants build relationships, stay energized, and develop trust and teamwork skills. **This section is packed with instructions and wonderful videos**

This modular design ensures the toolkit can be adapted to each school's unique context, resources, and needs.