



#GetLoud

about what **MENTAL HEALTH** really is.

Welcome to the *Mental Health Week School Toolkit*

We have put together some resources and activities to help you bring Mental Health Week into your classroom.

Here's what you'll find in this Toolkit:

- An 11 page overview about mental health promotion and children, including information and resources on Social Emotional Learning (SEL), resilience, and diversity and inclusion.
- A Mental Health Week poster
- Three Mental Health Week activities designed for ages 6-12. These activities can also be adapted for older – and even younger – students.

Introduction

You are an educator. Teaching children is already a high-stress job. And there you are on the frontlines of ensuring the well-being of your students. You play a key role in your students' mental health, but you are not necessarily a mental health expert. The very good news is that you don't have to be. In fact, with the right tools, you have the capacity to create a mentally healthy classroom environment. In fact, you are probably already *doing* positive mental health in your classroom, maybe without even calling it that.

By understanding what you can do and learning how to integrate it into your daily practices, you can support and build your students' emotional and social well-being. While you're at it, you can actually improve your own experience of teaching.

This year, CMHA Mental Health Week declares: Get Loud about what mental health really is.

And so, the mental health of your students: what is it really?

One thing mental health isn't: it isn't just simply the absence of mental illness. It is a positive state. It is the state of being able to feel, think, act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face.

Over one-quarter (28%) of students say there was a time they wanted to talk to someone about a mental health problem but did not know where to turn.

(School Mental Health ASSIST)

If children don't have positive mental health, they are at risk of being unhappy, in distress, isolated, and/or bullied. They are at risk of depression, anxiety and suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among children 10-19 years old. (Statistics Canada) Mental illness is tragically a very real

experience for many Canadian children. The stats vary, but it is estimated that 1/6 Canadian children live with a mental illness and that 70% of mental illnesses start in childhood. Although mental illness may be caused by a combination of biology, psychology and environment, getting ahead of it is often possible, through mental illness prevention and by intervening and treating it early.

Another key element in prevention is something called “mental health promotion.”

What is Mental Health Promotion?

Mental Health Promotion is all about creating environments that promote and sustain positive mental health for everyone. That's where you come in. The school, and the classroom teacher, are key to promoting the mental health of children.

Up to 80% of children and youth who experience a mental health problem will not receive treatment. This is because of stigma, a lack of services and problems seeking help.
(School Mental Health ASSIST)

Children's mental health is at risk and that risk is growing. CMHA's policy paper, released this Mental Health Week, argues that the prominence of social media in children's lives may be having a negative effect on their mental health.

The case for school-based mental health promotion is as clear-cut as it gets. Research shows that school-based mental health promotion programs:

- Enhance regulation of emotions
- Enhance coping and problem-solving skills
- Enhance empathy and respect for diversity
- Improve attitudes about self, others and school
- Improve academic achievement
- Decrease bullying and aggression
- Decrease behavioural problems
- Reduce emotional stress, anxiety, depression and suicide
- Reduce drug use

And if you're trying to make an economic case, the return on investment is very good. Some estimate that for every \$1 invested, \$11 are saved in providing services. (wellahead.ca)

In CMHA's *Mental Health Week School Toolkit*, we are focusing on three mental health promotion topics – Social Emotional Learning, Resilience, and Diversity and Inclusion. We are also providing some activities designed to help you mark Mental Health Week in your classrooms.

Sources:

- [The Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health Positive Mental Health Toolkit \(2nd Edition\)](#)
- [Manitoba Healthy Schools](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
- [The Health of Canada's Young People: a mental health focus \(2011\)](#)
- [Healthy Settings for Young People in Canada \(2008\)](#)
- [Wellahead.ca](#)
- [School Mental Health ASSIST](#)

Social Emotional Learning

SEL. It stands for social emotional learning. Does it sound like a buzzword? Or just another add-on to the curriculum? It actually isn't. It is an education movement that has been gathering steam, first in the US, and now across Canada, and is firmly based in science. It can utterly transform the way we teach children, positively affecting their mental health, and yes, even their academic success.

It is more than just a program or a lesson. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is as much about how we teach as it is what you teach. SEL helps us apply a different lens to the education of children: the lens of emotions, empathy and positive relationships and it actually improves children's academic success. As well as their overall mental health.

So what is it essentially? Through SEL, children learn the skills to understand and cope with their emotions. This way they can learn how to calm themselves when they're upset, and how to care and show care for others. It fosters good relationships and good decisions.

And by the way, it's not just for children. It's for teachers; it's for parents; it's for everyone.

Here is the nitty gritty of what SEL can help develop in children:

- How to identify and manage their emotions
- How to set and follow their goals
- How to show caring and concern for others
- How to make and keep good relationships
- How to make decisions that show respect for themselves and others
- How to deal with conflict and other interpersonal challenges.

Resources:

We have put together a list of resources, toolkits and videos on SEL that you can adapt for your classroom, or use to help explain SEL to parents.

Here are some short videos that tell the SEL story:

- SEL Introduction:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUnUYMZD2PY&feature=youtu.be>
- SEL for Parents:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2d0da6BZWA>

- Five Social and Emotional competencies:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWZeR1bB038>
- Kids Matter Australia Video:
<https://vimeo.com/153540533>

Social and Emotional Learning:

- SEL For Prevention:
Step Up is a set of free-standing social emotional learning lessons adapted for middle school students in response to the 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (US).
<https://selforprevention.com/>
- Educate the Heart video: An inspirational video on the roles schools have to play in fostering social and emotional skills.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=SOYOa4Flj-Y

Here are some toolkits and program guides that can help you bring SEL to life in your classrooms:

- <https://extension.umn.edu/what-youth-development/sel-toolkit>
- https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/themes/51172dcc1ad07a63d6000002/attachments/original/1361410998/2_SocialEmotionalLearningToolkit.pdf - link to 2.pdf?1361410998
- On social emotional learning and bullying
http://actforyouth.net/youth_development/professionals/sel/
- An online platform that offers step-by-step guidance and field-tested tools to help school teams implement high-quality SEL. (Jan 2019)
<https://schoolguide.casel.org/>

We have just scratched the surface of the many, excellent resources that are out there. To find more, consult the amazing Canadian resource finders here:

- Great resource finder for SEL brought to you by the University of British Columbia.
<http://www.selresources.com/sel-resources/>
- A resource finder from Well Ahead (wellahead.ca), an initiative of the McConnell Foundation.
<https://www.wellahead.ca/resources>

Resilient Children: up on their feet again

Despite our best efforts to shield them, children will experience disappointments, and stress. It's impossible to protect them from the difficulties of life. What isn't impossible—in fact, what is very possible—is to help children learn how to manage life's ups and downs and build their coping skills. This can help them feel good about themselves, trust others and feel hopeful and optimistic.

This is called resilience. One straightforward way to define it is the ability to “bounce back” and thrive in the face of difficulties.

So, that's resilience in a nutshell. It is also important to remember what it is **not**:

Resilience is **not** about encouraging children to cope quietly when things are tough. We need to encourage children to speak up about their feelings and their needs.

Social emotional learning (SEL) can help them do that. (See our info sheet for more on SEL.)

What does a resilient child look like?

Resilient children don't just *look* like they're coping. They actually are. They feel that you appreciate them as they are. Exactly as they are. They don't expect unreasonable things from themselves. They have coping strategies, including knowing how to ask for—and get—support when they need it.

Some researchers talk about the skills—or assets—children need in order to be resilient. Here are the basics:

The child:

- feels appreciated and valued
- understands how to set realistic expectations for themselves and others
- has good problem-solving skills
- has good coping strategies
- asks for help
- gets positive support from adults
- has good interactions with other children

And here are some activities and strategies you can use to help children develop these assets:

How I'm doing: a student-led report card

Develop a report card designed to encourage the child to reflect on their own strengths and areas for development, both personal and academic. Have a meeting, led by the student, and use the opportunity to reinforce positive attributes, and support their potential to develop. This focus on strengths will promote their self-confidence.

Mindfulness, or the practice of coming back to the present moment, can help reduce emotional distress in children.

Come back to the here and now:

Here's one simple technique to help your students to come out of their worries, and back into their body sensations. It can help them calm themselves.

Guide your student by saying: when you notice you're worrying about something, take a quiet moment for yourself. Simply and kindly say to yourself "come back", breathe, and focus on what you're doing right now. What can you see? What can you feel? What can you hear? What can you smell? Who is around you?

The internet is awash with mindfulness videos and exercises, including those adapted for children. These exercises can include guided dance, stretching, breathing, and working out.

Here are some other resources you can check out:

Go Noodle:

<https://www.gonoodle.com/>

Go Noodle is a free online library of fun, short videos that encourage movement and cultivate mindfulness in students. Go Noodle is designed to engage students in using their bodies to energize or calm down in a short time.

Smiling Mind

<https://www.smilingmind.com.au/>

Smiling Mind is a web and app-based program designed for children 7 or older, (and anyone beyond). It was designed by psychologists and educators to help develop emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and social awareness skills in children using mindfulness meditation techniques.

Pure power

<http://pureedgeinc.org/>

Pure Power teaches students ways to manage stress, respond versus react, act with compassion, and set goals.

Toolkits:

Here are some toolkits from the UK that can help *you* help *children* to develop resilience.

<https://www.headstartkent.org.uk/schools-and-practitioners/resilience-toolkit>

<https://www.seemescotland.org/media/8155/resilience-toolkit.pdf>

Promoting diversity and inclusion

Belonging is key to ensuring positive mental health in children and youth. You are always looking for ways to make sure that your students feel included and, on the flip side, that they aren't excluded or bullied.

Our classrooms, like our country, are places where diversity lives. Maybe we think primarily about cultural, racial and ethnic diversity. But the list is long: we also need to consider social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age and sexual orientation. (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 2000). This shouldn't be just a laundry list. Respecting and celebrating diversity in all of its richness can help ensure that children feel connected to each other, and that they don't find themselves on the outside, alienated, alone and in despair.

You, as educators, can help make your school and your classroom emotionally and psychologically safe spaces for *all* children.

Here are some things to take into account when creating inclusive classrooms:

Children come in all shapes, sizes and levels of physical ability. They should never be body-shamed. Body-shaming can lead to the internalization of negative body image, to eating disorders, and to weight-based bullying. Please see our fact sheet called *All bodies are good bodies*.

Not all children are gender "conforming": they are gender and sexually diverse. It is important to ensure that your school and your classroom are safe, caring and supportive for children, including those who do not conform to gender categories.

Schools offer an important place of welcoming for children who are newcomers to Canada. Beyond fostering belonging and connectedness, educators must also be aware that children who come as refugees may have experienced trauma, and they may need extra supports. In fact, by knowing what trauma supports are available in your community, you can assist all of your students who may require them.

Here is a checklist of ways to promote respect and appreciation for diversity and differences in schools. It was adapted from a resource created by the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health (<http://wmaproducts.com/JCSHModule2/>).

- Are you providing opportunities for students to understand and value the similarities and differences among people?
- Are you including resource people in the classroom who come from a range of backgrounds and perspectives?
 - This may include inviting Elders and others from Indigenous communities to share their ways of knowing, their traditions and their values
 - This may include community members from other countries, cultures, home languages and identities
- As an educator, are you showing the way?

- Do you yourself model respect for individual and cultural differences?
- ☑ Does your classroom reflect the world?
 - Expand student awareness of individual and cultural differences through the materials you bring into the classroom
 - Ensure diversity when assigning student projects:
 - For example, biographical projects should include people of different cultures and identities
- ☑ Are you supporting students in the exploration of their own differences and identities?
 - For instance: support students in their efforts to create groups that advocate for supportive and safe environments

All bodies are good bodies

Bullying. It happens in classrooms and in playgrounds, and beyond the boundaries of school. As educators of children, you are looking to stop it in its tracks. You and your school are likely actively engaged in doing just that.

There are so many forms of bullying: from cyber and verbal, to physical and emotional. They all cause harm and threaten the well-being of your students, whether they are experiencing it themselves or witnessing it.

One prevalent and harmful form of bullying is weight-based bullying, or the teasing and harassment of children based on body size and shape, and it happens mostly at school and online. Perhaps more and more, as social media has exploded, children are learning from an early age that there is an “ideal” body shape. The body shaming and bullying that can result take their toll on children’s mental health, causing distress, self-loathing and eating disorders.

Are you looking for ways to address weight-based bullying? Here are some effective mental health promotion strategies brought to us by Manitoba Healthy Schools, which, incidentally provides excellent, general resources and practices to promote mental health in schools at https://www.gov.mb.ca/healthyschools/docs/Mental_Health_Promotion.pdf

- ☑ Make sure that the images in your classroom, and homework assignments reflect diverse physical abilities, body sizes and outward appearances.
- ☑ Reinforce the message that bodies come naturally in all shapes, sizes, weights and colours – and that all bodies are to be respected.
- ☑ When you discuss bullying, make sure to include weight-based bullying and body shaming, such as a child being excluded from the group or getting teased about her/his weight or shape.
- ☑ In lessons on puberty, discuss the natural weight gain that precedes major growth spurts for boys and girls.
- ☑ Teach children that all bodies are good bodies. Encourage them to accept their bodies and care for them by practising healthy habits and being kind to themselves.
- ☑ Compare food to fuel (ex: Just like a car needs “fuel” to continue operating, you need “food” to continue growing and developing in a healthy way).

- ☑ Teach kids to eat for energy, health and pleasure.
- ☑ Promote physical activity because it is fun and supports good mental and physical health. Changing children's body shapes and sizes should never be the goal!
- ☑ Do not measure bodies in physical education, or in any other context.
- ☑ Choose respectful language when discussing bodies and health.
- ☑ And teachers, while you're working to make your classroom safe for all students, don't forget to examine your own values and beliefs about body size and weight.

Teacher Resources:

- Beyond Images (National Eating Disorder Information Centre, Canada) Lesson plans for Grades 4-8 exploring key issues around body image and self-esteem as well as media messaging and critical thinking skills. www.beyondimages.ca/
- Body Image Friendly School Resources (Australia) www.youth.gov.au/sites/Youth/bodyImage/
- Talking to Kids about Media and Body Image - Tip Sheet (SmartsMedia, Canada). This resource helps adults talk with children and teenagers about unrealistic bodies in the media. <https://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/talking-kids-about-media-body-image-tip-sheet>
- Healthy Bodies: Teaching Kids What They Need to Know (Kathy Kater, USA) Lesson plans for Grades 4-6 teaching about body image, eating, fitness and weight concerns. Adaptable for all ages. <http://bodyimagehealth.org/healthy-bodies-curriculum/>
- The Student Body: Promoting Health At Every Size (Ontario) Teacher Training Modules About Media and Peer Pressure, Healthy Eating, Active Living, Teasing, Adult Role Models, School Climate <http://thestudentbody.aboutkidshealth.ca/>
- The Bully Project: <http://www.thebullyproject.com/>
- Social Emotional Learning and Bullying Prevention https://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/3_SEL_and_Bullying_Prevention_2009.pdf
- National Eating Disorder Information Centre on weight-based bullying: www.nedic.ca/weight-based-bullying
- Manitoba Healthy Schools on health body image: https://www.gov.mb.ca/healthyschools/docs/healthy_body_image.pdf