

Supporting Conversations With Parents/ Families About Mental Health and Well-being

TIP
SHEET

School leaders establish a culture of caring and well-being when they act as champions in creating and maintaining a positive school climate that not only ensures student success but supports mental health. Establishing and maintaining positive relationships with parents and families conveys a commitment to enhancing student mental health and well-being which is imperative in promoting the mental health of all students (Ontario Leadership Framework, 2012). These tips are intended to support you in your conversations with parents/families about mental health and well-being as you continue to partner with them in their child's education.

Think in tiers

Thinking in tiers by using the aligned and integrated model (AIM) provides the foundations for engaging in conversations across the three tiers of intervention.

For ALL

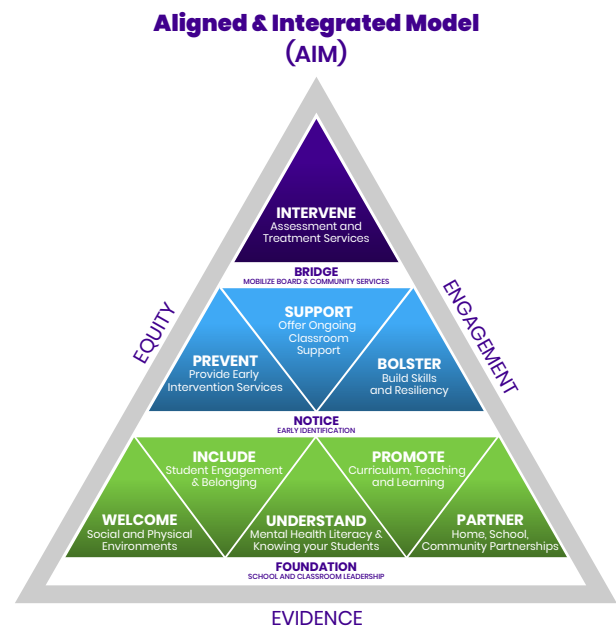
Build a common language of mental health and offer universal supports (Tier 1)

For SOME

Provide additional information and support for parents/families when concerns become evident (Tier 2)

For A FEW

Build confidence and anticipate more significant needs for learning or mental health support (Tier 3)



ALL

All parents/families require a common understanding and shared language about mental health and well-being. What do they need to do this?

- Credible and current information about mental health and well-being regarding children and youth.
- Information presented in a way that reduces the stigma about mental health.

Actions

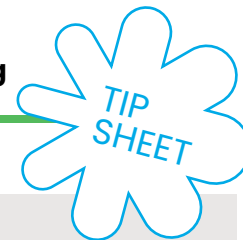
- Look for opportunities when parents/families are gathered at school, to share information about mental health awareness and promotion as part of the school culture.
- Consider how you present information about mental health. Language can mean different things to different people. Be sensitive to the experiences of parents/families and adjust your language and approach to be appropriate to and supportive of the context.
- Provide information about your school's mental health action plan in language that is accessible to all and if possible provide it in the languages most prevalent in your school.
- Make use of the School Mental Health Ontario website and information sheets to support your conversations with parents/families.
- Inform parents/families of who to go to if they have questions or would like additional information.



School
Mental Health
Ontario

Santé mentale
en milieu scolaire
Ontario

www.smho-smso.ca



SOME

Some parents/families may begin to have concerns about their child, what do they need?

- **Credible information about signs or symptoms to look for.**
- **Information about when to be concerned.**
- **Information about what to do if they are worried.**

Actions

- Offer private conversations with the parents/families and current teachers. Listen to the family's concern in a caring and empathetic manner and take note of their concerns.
- Ensure there is sufficient time allocated for parents/ families to share their concerns and hear the observations and perspectives of the teachers.
- Ensure all staff are prepared for this conversation and always begin with sharing the student's strengths.
- Bring dated, documented observations about patterns of behaviour which have changed, persisted and/or interfered with learning and social interactions.
- Have knowledge about the circle of support available within and outside the school system.
- Be prepared to discuss what internal system supports are available to your school and explain how these services are accessed.
- If you are unsure, collaborate with your school's professional support staff, such as social work or psychology staff or your board's mental health lead.

A FEW

A few families will already have a child with an identified or diagnosed mental health disorder. When this is the case, what do they need?

- **Trust and confidence to share with you and relevant school personnel what the treatment plan is for their child.**
- **Confidence in your school's ability to continue to teach their child and safeguard their mental health and well-being.**

Actions

Acknowledge and understand that the whole family is under tremendous stress and they are doing the best they can at this time. Be aware of and question your judgements and assumptions.

- Ask parents/families how they are doing and listen with compassion and empathy to their responses.
- Ask specific questions about the treatment plan and what accommodations and supports have been suggested or families believe would be helpful. If those requests are impossible, do not shut down the conversation or minimize the request. Think about alternatives and collaborate with others on the teaching and support team to see what might be possible.
- Acknowledge the student's struggle and ask what you/staff could do to support them.
- Communication! This is crucial both between educator teams and with families. Ensure you have a specific plan for communication with families and stick to it. Even a quick note to ask how things are going, can make a huge difference in the relationship between family and school.

