



# Educator preparation suggestions

**Mental health is a topic we all have personal connections to, and it can elicit strong feelings. The suggestions below are intended to help you have a safe and healthy conversation with your students as you deliver the four lessons in this series.**

## Check in on yourself

Before you begin a discussion with your students, take a moment to reflect. Are you in a good place personally to have the conversation? Be aware of your feelings. If this isn't the right time for you to approach the topic, pause before speaking with students and reach out for support from your administrator, if you need to. See "Take Care of Yourself – Your Mental Health Matters" in the lesson plans.

## Consider your role

(and boundaries of this role, including when to seek help)

As an educator, you are not expected to be an expert in mental health. But you have an important role in creating mentally healthy classroom environments, noticing students you may be concerned about, and teaching students about maintaining good mental health as part of their overall health. Educators are also well-positioned to help promote student mental health each day at school and maintain a sense of hope during these difficult times.

### As you engage with the materials, your role can be to:

- ▶ Keep the focus on positive mental health.
- ▶ Create a safe space where participants feel comfortable taking in new information and expressing ideas.
- ▶ Be mindful of accessibility and inclusivity of Black, Indigenous, racialized, and 2SLGBTQI+ communities.
- ▶ Encourage participation, to the degree students are comfortable.
- ▶ Guide the conversation, keep it focused on the lesson, and avoid setting up opportunities for sensitive personal disclosures (offer ways to safely report personal/peer concerns, should they arise).



## Build your knowledge

If you feel you could benefit from additional learning, consider digging more deeply into mental health literacy.

- ▶ [Mentally Healthy Schools and Classrooms](#) (smho-smsso.ca)
- ▶ [Supporting Minds Strategies at a Glance](#) (smho-smsso.ca)
- ▶ [Supporting Mentally Healthy Conversations About Anti-Black Racism with Students](#) (smho-smsso.ca)

## Engage support

- ▶ Ensure you have reviewed the [School Readiness Checklist](#) and have the support of a team.
- ▶ If it is an option, consider inviting a mental health support staff (e.g., Child and Youth Counsellor, Social Worker) to co-facilitate the lessons with you. Having someone to co-facilitate allows one of you to focus on delivering the content while the other can monitor how students are receiving the information, answer questions, and address any issues that may arise.
- ▶ Ensure you know who is available for support and have their up-to-date contact information readily accessible.
- ▶ Ensure you have up to date contact information for students and parents/guardians, as well.
- ▶ Know the pathways to care within your school and community.
- ▶ Share culturally responsive mental health resources with students/families often (e.g., post resources in your classroom and provide regular reminders regarding help-seeking, especially before weekends).
- ▶ Know the warning signs for suicide risk and your board protocols for suicide prevention and intervention.

**You are not alone.** Your school and school board have a circle of mental health support. All Ontario boards have a [mental health leader](#) and superintendent with responsibility for mental health.

## Consider the context

- ▶ If there have been any recent events in your school community that would make mental health a particularly sensitive conversation or if you are aware of any students who may find it a difficult topic, reach out to your school team to plan.
- ▶ Together with the school team (i.e., administrator, mental health support staff) have a plan for students who may need to be excused or opt out of the lesson.
- ▶ COVID-19 is also part of our current context and has resulted in losses for students and educators alike, including the loss of freedom, connection, and for some, family members and loved ones. Collectively, and cumulatively, this sense of loss can challenge our well-being. It should also be noted that some communities have disproportionately and distinctly experienced the impact of the pandemic, such as Indigenous, Black, Asian, and other racialized communities.

[Loss, Grief, and Bereavement during the COVID-19 Pandemic Info sheet For Educators](#) (smho-smsso.ca)



## Consider the timing

- ▶ These lessons take approximately 45 minutes to deliver but may take up to a full period depending on how engaged your students are, the links you make to your curriculum area, and your use of the extensions and optional materials provided.
- ▶ The lessons are best delivered once you have established relationships with students and a safe and caring culture in your classroom.
- ▶ If your school or class is interrupted or the class structure changes, you may wish to allow time for students to adjust and for relationships to be re-established before delivering the lessons.
- ▶ Consider offering the lessons mid-week (Mondays can be difficult for some students), and during the beginning or middle of the day. This allows more opportunity for you to monitor students following the lessons and determine if anyone requires support.

## Acknowledge stigma

- ▶ Recognize the range of prior knowledge in the class. Anticipate that some students will come with misinformation or biased perspectives on mental health and mental illness.
- ▶ Offer factual information, dispel myths, and model destigmatizing language for your class.

## Check in with students

- ▶ As you move through the material, and following the completion of each lesson, monitor student reactions and reach out to anyone who seems to be struggling.
- ▶ Include specific details about where and how students can obtain help (e.g., help lines, school and community resources) and encourage help-seeking.
- ▶ Should you decide to deliver a lesson over more than one period, allow an opportunity for students to transition before beginning new work and provide information about where and how students can seek help each time (review safety reminders). It may also be helpful to discuss what was covered previously before re-engaging with the material.
- ▶ Encourage and model strategies that support coping and resiliency.
- ▶ Pay attention and respond to any concerning information you receive from students about peers. They often know a peer is struggling before we do.



## Consider the opportunities within these lessons!

- Modeling
- Opening conversations
- Providing reliable information
- Problem solving
- Skill building
- Decreasing stigma
- Increasing awareness of resources
- Encouraging help-seeking
- Partnering with professional support staff

## Educator reflection questions:

- How can I make connections between these lessons and my course curriculum?
- How am I creating an inclusive and safe learning environment, so students feel comfortable engaging in the conversation?
- How will I help students who need it reach support?
- How will I care for myself as I lead students through these materials?

