

Student Mental Health in Action

Know the Facts

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Grades 9 – 12

Lesson plan

This is the first in a series of four lessons to support the development of basic mental health knowledge and help-seeking skills. Each lesson will include:

- **Minds On:** an activity for student reflection
- **Action Task:** engagement with the core content of the lesson
- **Consolidation:** activities for students to continue the learning
- **Transition:** a brief practice/activity to end in a positive way and help students transition to the rest of their day
- **Support:** a reminder about available resources and encouragement of help-seeking

Note: a [slide deck](#) for the lesson has been prepared for your use. Additional resources (e.g., Kahoots, videos, handouts) are also embedded throughout the lesson to support various activities.

LEARNING GOALS	SUCCESS CRITERIA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge common misconceptions about mental health and consider their negative impact. • Demonstrate an understanding of mental health, mental illness, and the dual continuum. • Increase knowledge needed to help take care of our own well-being and the well-being of those around us. 	<p>Co-develop success criteria with students using the following questions: “How will we know we are achieving our learning goals? What will it look like/sound like?”</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can recognize that mental health is a positive concept. • I can practice, observe, and apply strategies to respond to misinformation about mental health. • I can take steps to treat my mental and physical health similarly.
CONSIDERATIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators may need to differentiate the activities to meet the needs of all learners within the class/group and ensure they can engage with the information in developmentally appropriate and accessible ways. For example, consider students requiring accommodations or modifications to engage in the learning and offer choice where possible (e.g., responding on sticky notes, through a virtual tool, or orally with a partner). • Approaches to all instruction, including mental health information, are most supportive when they are mediated through recognition and understanding of students’ cultural contexts, lived realities, and the impacts of inequities, biases, discrimination, and marginalization. 	



CONSIDERATIONS (CONTINUED)

- Be mindful during any sharing that the focus is on learning about mental health together as a class rather than addressing individual mental health problems, which can take time and support. If there is a sensitive personal story a student wishes to share, invite them to see you after class and provide alternative ways for their needs to be met. This will allow the class to prioritize your time together for learning while ensuring that students have an opportunity to address any personal concerns. Refer to the following resources for more information and take time to consider your school and board circle of support and service pathways. Know what to do and who to connect with if a student seems like they might be experiencing poor mental health.
 - [ONE-CALL Desk Reference](https://smho-smso.ca) (smho-smso.ca)
 - [Talking with Parents and Families about Mental Health](https://smho-smso.ca) (smho-smso.ca)
 - [Circle of Support and System Pathways – Flowchart](https://smho-smso.ca) (smho-smso.ca)

For more suggestions for delivering the series of lessons, see the [Educator preparation suggestions for MH LIT: Student Mental Health in Action](#) resource.

SETTING THE STAGE

Spend a few minutes talking with the class about what students need to feel comfortable discussing mental health. Acknowledge there is stigma related to the topic. Collaboratively create some “ground rules” or shared agreements to guide the discussion. Here are some suggestions:

- ▶ Keep the focus on mental health facts and information, rather than sharing sensitive personal stories.
- ▶ Be open to learning.
- ▶ There is room for everyone to contribute, but you don’t have to speak if you don’t want to.
- ▶ Use thoughtful, non-stigmatizing language about mental health that makes everyone feel included.
- ▶ Listen to and respect each other’s opinions and points of view. Value the contributions of cultures and practices that may be different from your own.
- ▶ Share the mental health facts and information with others but keep our conversation private.
- ▶ Ask for additional ideas from the group.

If a student does start to make a disclosure during class, you may redirect them using a statement such as the following: “Thank you for sharing. This is important and I want to give it the time and attention it deserves. Let’s check in after class.”



MINDS ON

Warm-up activity

Ask students to share three words that come to mind when they think about mental health (e.g., on sticky notes, through a virtual tool, or orally with a partner). Choose the method that best suits your learning situation and the needs of students. Then ask students to do the same for mental illness.

Ask students to consider their responses:

- ▶ Were they similar?
- ▶ Did they describe mental illness both times?
- ▶ Why do they think that happened?

Teacher prompt: “When we talk about mental health, we often think about mental illness. Mental health is a positive concept. That’s what we are going to learn more about today.”

Mental health and myth busting quiz

The second part of the minds on is an interactive quiz that will allow you to learn more about students’ knowledge and perceptions of mental health. It will also give you the opportunity to dispel some common myths and misconceptions about mental health and mental illness. The questions, answers, and notes are available in [Appendix A](#) and the quiz is also available in the slide deck and as a Kahoot quiz for you to project to your class, making it easy for you and students to use. A handout has been provided for additional flexibility.

Following the quiz, use the notes to engage in a discussion about the correct answer.

Teacher prompt (to close): “There is a lot of misinformation out there, and many of us don’t have the basic information about mental health we need to help us take care of our own well-being and the well-being of those around us. That’s why we’re having this lesson.”

Note: Some educators will choose to use Kahoot or another digital tool to bring forward information about mental health in an interesting way. This can help with student engagement, but it is important to avoid presenting the material in a game-like manner. Some students will have deep personal connections to the content and presenting it as a game-like quiz can be experienced as trivializing or diminishing their experiences and the importance of the topic. Please remember to use a sensitive approach when presenting the mental health facts in this way.

[Slide deck](#)
[Kahoot quiz](#)
[Handout](#)

ACTION TASK

Introduction to the dual continuum: The Action Task is a discussion of the mental health and mental illness dual continuum. It helps students understand that mental health and mental illness are two different things. See [Appendix B](#) for a graphic of the dual continuum. The slide deck contains ‘press and play’ videos developed to assist in facilitating this lesson.

[Introduction to the dual continuum – Slide deck](#)


Teacher prompt: “We all have mental health, just like we all have physical health. Mental health is the state of an individual’s psychological and emotional well-being. Good mental health allows us to feel, think and act in ways that help us enjoy life and cope with its challenges. It’s something we want for ourselves and the people we care about.”

One way to understand mental health comes from the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (Health Canada & Assembly of First Nations, 2014). It suggests that mental health and well-being is inspired through ‘a balance of the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional.’ This balance is in place when we have:

- ▶ **purpose** in our daily lives
- ▶ **hope** for the future
- ▶ a sense of **belonging** and connectedness within our families, to community, and to culture
- ▶ a sense of **meaning** and an understanding of how our lives and those of our families and communities are part of creation and a rich history

This way of thinking about mental health is different from the way we used to understand it. We used to think that mental health was on a single continuum or line that went from mental illness at one end to mental health at the other, and we moved along the continuum depending on what was happening in our lives and other factors. Now we know it’s more complex than that. Mental health and mental illness are actually two separate yet interconnected ideas. **It’s a dual continuum.**

In the dual continuum model, we still move along states of mental well-being which can change over time, and all of us can occasionally experience poor mental health. But now we understand that not having a mental illness does not guarantee we feel well, and everyone, including those with mental illness, has an opportunity to live as a whole and healthy individual.

The idea of having a mental illness but feeling mentally healthy or thriving at the same time may seem a bit confusing. It can help to think about physical health. If someone with diabetes (a physical illness) has what they need to manage their illness, they may feel well, despite having an illness. The same is true for someone with depression. If they have what they need to manage their illness, they may also feel mentally well and experience a good quality of life.

Let’s consider two examples:

These student examples are also available as short videos in the slide deck.

Jayden has depression. They take an effective medication and are learning strategies to manage their mood from a mental health professional they trust. Their friends and family are supportive and understanding, and their school is flexible about the time they need for their medical appointments and offers Jayden help with any missed work. They are taking classes they are interested in and working toward a career path they feel will be a good fit. Despite their depression, Jayden is experiencing good mental health. (On the dual continuum graphic, this represents the “good mental health with mental illness” quadrant.)

[Jayden Student Example Video – YouTube](#)

[Jayden Student Example Video – Vimeo](#)



Bina does not have a mental illness. Because of pressure from home, she is taking courses which are not areas of interest for her. She does not enjoy the work and is struggling to maintain the marks her parents expect. Because of all the time she spends on her classes, Bina has had to give up the hobbies and interests she enjoyed and she spends little time with her friends. She is starting to feel overwhelmed, and often has trouble sleeping and stomach aches. Despite not having a mental illness, Bina is experiencing poor mental health. (On the dual continuum graphic, this represents the “poor mental health without mental illness” quadrant.)

[Bina Student Examples Video – YouTube](#)

[Bina Student Examples Video – Vimeo](#)

CONSOLIDATION

Student reflection:

- ▶ If you had a physical health concern, what do you think you would need to make you feel well and experience a good quality of life?
- ▶ If you had a mental health concern, what do you think you would need to make you feel well and experience a good quality of life?
- ▶ Why do we often feel more comfortable asking for what we need to support our physical health versus our mental health?

Note: student reflections are intended to be flexible. You may ask students to reflect individually or share their reflections (e.g., orally with a partner or the larger group, or through sticky notes or other virtual tools).

Wrap-up questions:

- ▶ What new information did you learn?
- ▶ Is there anything from our discussion that really stood out for you or surprised you?
- ▶ Has anything changed in terms of the way you think about mental health?

Key messages:

- ▶ We all have mental health, just like we all have physical health.
- ▶ Mental health is a good thing! We all want to have good mental health for ourselves, our family, and our friends.
- ▶ Everyone can strive for good mental health, including those with mental illness.

TRANSITION

Taking Care of Yourself

Teacher prompt: “I encourage you to take care of yourselves today by doing something you enjoy and that gives you a sense of well-being. When we notice that the battery in our phone is running low, we plug it in. Take the time to notice how you are doing and to recharge yourselves every day. Prioritize yourself, too, and do so regularly. Don’t wait until your battery is empty.”



Student handouts

- ▶ [Self-Care Checklist](#) (kidshelpphone.ca)
- ▶ [Self-Care 101 for Students](#) (smho-smso.ca)

Activity

Ask students to review the handout(s) and reflect on the strategies they use:

- ▶ Are some easier for them?
- ▶ Are some more difficult?
- ▶ Do they have a variety of strategies available for different circumstances (e.g., strategies they can use at home, at school, if they don't have much time, and so on)?
- ▶ Or are their strategies all of one type (e.g., physical, such as sports – what would happen if they sprained an ankle)?
- ▶ Is there a strategy they would like to practice more often?

Teacher prompt: “Not all strategies work for all people, and that’s okay! The idea is just to have a variety of tools available that are flexible enough to suit different circumstances. Remember that part of staying mentally well also means connecting with others who share your interests, culture, identities, and values.”

Optional video: Provide the class a video guided practice to help students wrap up the lesson and prepare to move on to whatever they have next in their day. Briefly let the class know the next lesson is coming and the topic (understanding your own mental health).

Finding Calm – Forest Visualization Video

SUPPORT-SEEKING RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Remind students that, if they are feeling unwell (e.g., overwhelmed, anxious, sad), they can talk to you or another adult they trust. There are people who work in schools, and in our community, who are there to help them find ways to feel better. Provide them with the resource list and encourage help-seeking.

Kids Help Phone

- Call: 1-800-668-6868
- Text: CONNECT to 686868
- Available to young people across Canada
- Services available in English and French (additional languages also offered)

Hope for Wellness Helpline for Indigenous people

- Call: 1-855-242-3310
- Available to all Indigenous people across Canada



- Services available in English and French
- Services available in Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut varies from week to week (call to request services in those languages)

Black Youth Helpline

- Call: 416-285-9944 or toll-free 1-833-294-8650
- Multicultural youth helpline serving all youth
- Services available in English

LGBT YouthLine

- Call: 1-800-268-9688
- Text: 647-694-4275
- Chat also available
- Available to 2S/LGBTQIA+ people 29 years and under across Ontario
- Services available in English

Trans Lifeline

- Call: 877-330-6366

Note: students may feel self-conscious about taking a picture or otherwise recording resources in front of others. It can be helpful to make resources available electronically on a class or school website. Students have shared that physical copies of resources placed in stairwells or the back door of washroom stall doors also offer privacy.

Tip: Some phone lines are open 24/7 and some have certain hours. Encourage students to check out the ones they prefer.





Appendix A

Mental Health Quiz

[Slide deck](#)
[Kahoot quiz](#)
[Handout](#)

#	QUESTION	ANSWER OPTIONS	NOTES
1	In a given year, how many Canadians will experience a form of mental illness?	20% (correct) 5% 40% 10%	Each year 1 in 5 Canadians experience a mental health problem. That means in the average secondary school classroom, there will be students who are impacted. Mental health problems are common, yet we don't always talk about them. This reminds us how important it is to use careful language about mental illness because it may be very personal to someone nearby. (Source: Canadian Institute of Health Research).
2	True or false: the majority of Ontario students in grades 7-12 rate their mental health as good to excellent.	True (correct) False	In 2023, 62% of students rated their mental health as good to excellent or very good, while 38% said it was fair or poor. (Source: OSDUHS, 2023). There are steps we can take to build our mental health, like exercising, getting enough sleep, and eating as best we can to support our physical health. We can also show kindness to our classmates and check in to make sure our friends are okay.
3	How do student ratings of good mental health change across grades 7 to 12?	They increase They decrease (correct) They stay the same	In grade 7, 71% of students rated their mental health over the past year as good to excellent. This decreased to 55% by grade 12. (Source: OSDUHS, 2023). Why do you think this happens? What could help maintain good mental health students experience in the earlier grades? Could learning about mental health at an earlier age help prevent these changes? Secondary school can be challenging, which makes it a great time to ramp up practices that support our mental health so we are better able to handle stress that may appear. There are things we can do to positively impact our mental health, like avoiding excessive screen time, spending time doing things that we enjoy, spending time with the supportive people in our lives, and learning more about mental health like we are today.



#	QUESTION	ANSWER OPTIONS	NOTES
4	True or false: physical habits like sleep, what we eat, and exercise impact mental health.	True (correct) False	When we take good care of our physical health, we are also improving our mental health. And when we take care of our mental health, it can make us feel better physically. Our physical and mental health are connected!
5	What percentage of mental health concerns begin in childhood and adolescence?	25% 10% 50% 70% (correct)	<p>About 70% of people tell us that their mental health concerns first appeared when they were children or youth. (Source: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (2014). Best practice guidelines for mental health promotion programs: Children (7-12) & youth (13-19). / Solmi, M., Radua, J., Olivola, M., Croce, E., Soardo, L., Salazar de Pablo, G., Il Shin, J., Kirkbride, J. B., Jones, P., Kim, J. H., Kim, J. Y., Carvalho, A. F., Seeman, M. V., Correll, C. U., & Fusar-Poli, P. (2022). Age at onset of mental disorders worldwide: Large-scale meta-analysis of 192 epidemiological studies. <i>Molecular Psychiatry</i>, 27(1), 281–295).</p> <p>That makes talking about mental health early, and asking for help when needed, very important. When young people get help for feelings of anxiety, depressed mood, or other mental health problems early, it can help prevent more serious difficulties later.</p> <p>Why is it that people will go to see their doctor for an earache almost right away, but when they are experiencing emotional concerns, they don't?</p>
6	True or false: people with mental illness are likely to be violent and unpredictable.	True False (correct)	<p>People with mental health issues are no more violent than any other group in our society. In fact, people with mental illness are actually more likely to be the victims of violence than other groups. There is still stigma, discrimination, and biases perpetuated in the media and popular culture. (Source: Canadian Mental Health Association (n.d.), "Violence and Mental Illness". Retrieved from www.cmha.ca).</p> <p>Young people like you can help change this! Fight stigma with truth.</p>



#	QUESTION	ANSWER OPTIONS	NOTES
7	True or false: among Ontario students in grades 7-12, vaping and alcohol use are increasing.	True False (correct)	<p>About 13% of students in grades 7-12 report vaping in the past year (more than just a few puffs). Past year vaping/ electronic cigarette use shows a significant decrease since the peak seen in 2019. Currently, just over one third of students in grades 7-12 drink alcohol. Alcohol use has been on a steady decline, reaching all-time lows in recent years (Source: OSDUHS, 2023).</p> <p>Does this data make sense to you? Why do you think fewer students across Ontario are vaping and using alcohol?</p>
8	True or false: only half of Canadians would tell a friend or co-worker that they have a family member with a mental illness.	True (correct) False	<p>Canadians continue to report that they are more likely to share a family member's physical illness versus mental illness (Source: Canadian Medical Association, 2008, 8th Annual National Report Card on Health Care).</p>
9	True or false: mental illness is a sign of weak character.	True False (correct)	<p>Statements like this seem to blame those with mental illness and imply they could be well if they just tried harder. There are also other negative messages associated with mental illness, such as the person is seeking attention (Source: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Introduction to Mental Health 101. Retrieved from www.camh.ca). It doesn't work like this. Some people have more risk of mental illness because of the negative impacts of things like racism, poverty, bullying, and so on, but mental health problems can happen to any of us. When you hear someone speak negatively about someone who is experiencing a mental health problem, consider how you would wish them to speak if it were you, your friend, or a family member and help them to change their words. It's important to think about how we talk about mental illness. Our words have an impact.</p>
10	True or false: mental illness is mostly caused by genetics.	True False (correct)	<p>Mental illness is complicated and can be linked to a variety of factors, such as our genetics, our experiences, our relationships and supports, our access to health care, current stressors, and many others. Fortunately, there are many factors that affect our mental health that we can influence.</p>



#	QUESTION	ANSWER OPTIONS	NOTES
11	True or false: there are treatments that can help mental health problems.	True (correct) False	<p>For example, with the right treatment, 80% of people with depression feel better or no longer experience symptoms at all. Both talking therapy and medication can help. No one treatment will work for every person, so it's important to find the right fit (Source: Canadian Mental Health Association).</p> <p>It should be acknowledged that, in addition to treatment, the things around us also matter. Our environment, life circumstances, and supports all play a role in our mental health and well-being.</p> <p>Keep in mind that there are many ways of getting help. Cultural practices, like spending time on the land and drumming, and support from an Elder can be helpful for some people. Being with others who identify as 2S/LGBTQIA+ and sharing experiences and a sense of belonging helps others. Some students benefit from meeting with a school social worker or psychologist to get them through a rough time. The first step is to reach out to an adult you trust who can help find what will work for you.</p>
12	Approximately how many students in Ontario talk to a mental health care professional in a given year?	12% 36% (correct) 6% 27%	<p>36% of Ontario students in grades 7-12 talked to a mental health care professional (such as a doctor, nurse, or school mental health professional) for a mental health issue. About 6% reported that they called a telephone crisis helpline or visited a website (or both) because they needed to talk to a counsellor about a problem (Source: OSDUHS, 2023).</p> <p>Chances are, you didn't know seeking support was so common. Why don't we feel freer to talk about it? When students in our school are experiencing a mental health problem, where can they go for support?</p> <p>Note: know your school circle of support and service pathways and share them with students. Name your school social worker, psychologist, or other available support staff. More information about help-seeking can be found in Lessons 3 and 4 of Student MH LIT.</p>

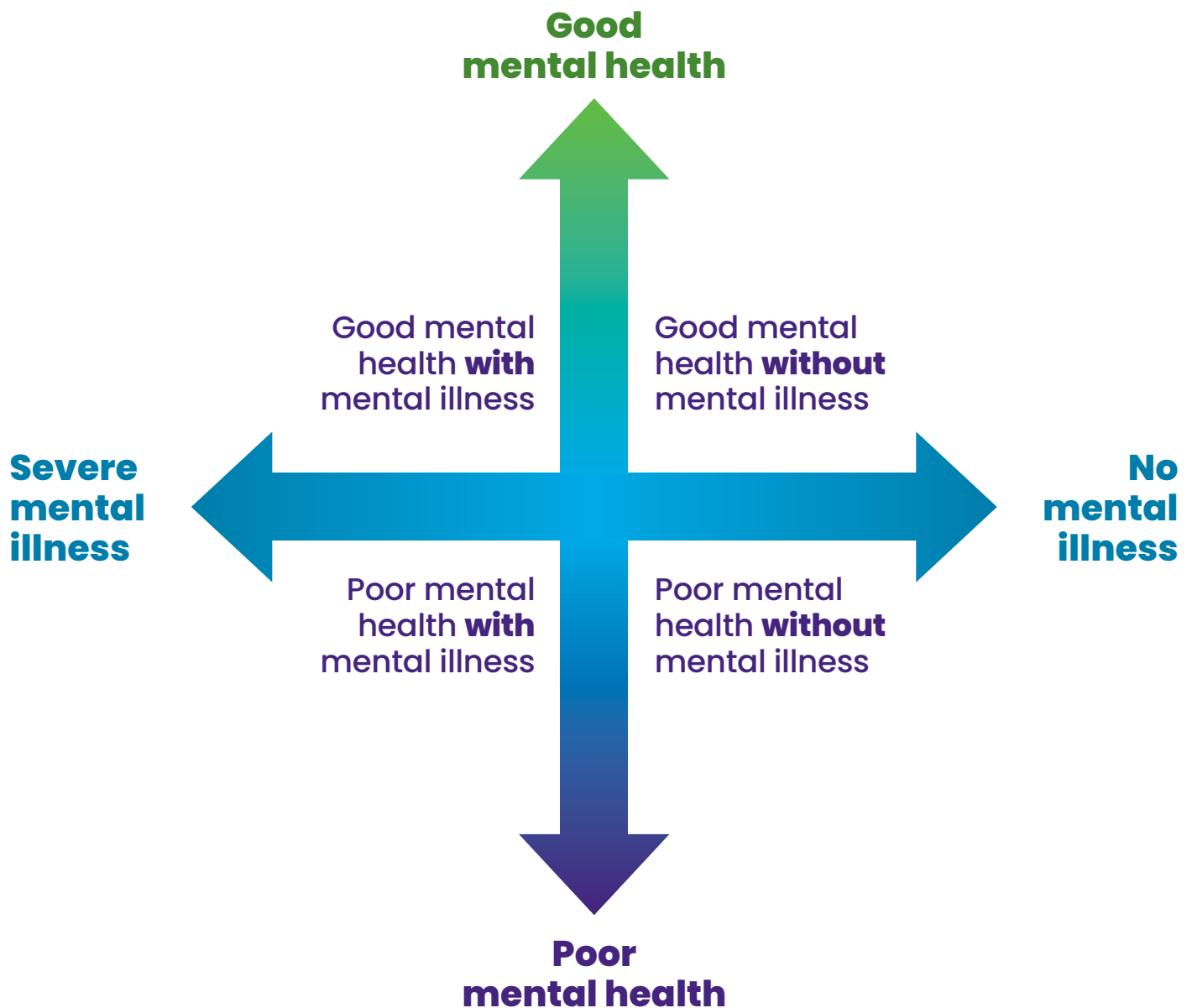




Appendix B

The Dual Continuum

The full action activity also available on a [Slide deck](#)





Extensions

Extend the lessons for your class

Should you have time and feel that mental health literacy is particularly relevant to your curriculum area and/or group of students, below are additional activities for you and your class.

Student voice

Where it fits: you may wish to introduce this conversation at the beginning of the Action portion of the lesson. It offers opportunities to discuss why mental health literacy is being brought into the classroom.

Share with students that in 2021, almost 2500 secondary school students across Ontario were asked about their priorities for mental health learning and programming in their schools and communities. Ask students to predict the results using the method that works best for your learning situation.

- ▶ What mental health topics did students think were most important for them to learn about?
- ▶ What areas did they feel least knowledgeable in?

Then provide the following information:

- ▶ Students identified the following mental health topics as most important for them to learn about:
 - when to seek help / when mental health needs are more than “a bad day”
 - ways to cope with common mental health problems
 - how to ask for help
 - warning signs for suicide
 - the difference between mental health and mental illness
 - how to help a friend without taking on too much
- ▶ Students indicated that the areas they felt least knowledgeable in were:
 - ways to cope with transitions and major stress
 - ways to stay optimistic and hopeful, even when things are not going well in the moment
 - ways to promote positive mental health

Student reflection: Do you think mental health should be a regular part of school, like physical health? What would you want that to look like? What would you most want to learn about?”



#HearNowON 2021: [Executive summary and full report](#) (smho-smso.ca).

Video summary: [Ontario students have a lot to say about mental health #HearNowON](#)

View this on **YouTube**

Note: to assist you in extending and reinforcing the concepts shared in this lesson, all classroom resources mentioned in this lesson have been organized into readily accessible links you can access: [Classroom Resources](#)

Extend your learning as an educator

Mental health and well-being aren't just important during a few days or lessons a year. They are important all year long. **Look for opportunities to integrate well-being and mental health literacy into course content.** Health and physical education provide a natural connection, but they are not the only place for students to learn about mental health and well-being. Many novels also offer obvious links. Perhaps a creative writing project could provide opportunities. Or does the character trait or virtue of the month connect to well-being? Could you look at brain chemistry or structure and mental health within a science course? Or maybe a math course provides a chance to examine mental health statistics. There are many ways to embed well-being into the work students do every day. [Learn more about how Student MH LIT connects to specific curriculum strands.](#)

Here are some additional ways to continue to bring well-being into your classroom and school.

LEARN	GROW	PARTNER	EXTEND
Take your learning deeper with the educator mental health literacy course developed collaboratively by mental health professionals and educators. It's free and available online.	<p>Student voice indicates that the majority of students are not currently involved in mental health leadership initiatives at their schools, but most would like to be. Students also suggested including and celebrating different leadership styles and emphasized the importance of diverse representation in leadership positions.</p> <p>HearNowON Student voice summary of findings</p> <p>Consider the opportunities in your school. Could you start a well-being club or student mental health leadership team? Student voice and participation are great ways to ensure well-being initiatives are engaging and meet the needs of your school community.</p>	Take full advantage of your professional support services school team, if one is available. Professional support services staff can help you identify well-being priorities, resources, and supports; they can provide professional learning opportunities, such as lunch and learns; and they can partner with you in the delivery of programs. Have a conversation with your school team about the full range of supports and services they offer.	<p>Continue to bring mental health and well-being into your classroom. There are a variety of resources available to assist you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wayfinder





Take care of yourself – educator mental health matters

The mental health and well-being of students, staff, and families are inextricably linked. Prioritize your own wellness and mental health, alongside that of students. Personal wellness looks different for each of us. There is no one way to maintain balance in the face of the many challenges and demands we all experience at times. Taking time for you, to engage in well-being practices and maintain connections that help you to feel well, is so very important, and sets an excellent example for students.

- [Personal Resiliency Tips – Take Care of Yourself](https://smso-smso.ca)
(smso-smso.ca)

If you feel you could benefit from support for your own mental health and well-being, connect with:

- ▶ Get medical advice:
 - Contact your family doctor, [Health811](https://health811.ca) (call 811 to connect to health care 24/7), or go to your nearest hospital
- ▶ Look into your board Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- ▶ Learn more about services in your area:
 - [Connex Ontario](https://www.connexontario.ca) (call 1-866-531-2600)
 - [Ontario 211](https://www.ontario211.ca) Community and Social Services Help Line (call or text 211)

For crisis support:

- ▶ [Suicide Crisis Helpline](https://www.suicidecrisis.ca) (call or text 988)

