Small Conversations, Big Impact

For Secondary Students

Young people within our education system attempt to navigate this “new normal” while also trying to understand themselves during a transitional time in their lives. Secondary students across Ontario are experiencing a unique set of challenges at this moment. Some of these challenges stem from the uncertainty that this pandemic has created about their school, work and personal lives.

This resource was created to equip educators with the language and additional resources to help support secondary students with their questions, concerns and comments related to loss and disappointment, uncertainty about the future, living life virtually, substance use and loss of caring connections.

Students often turn to educators as caring adults who can help when they are feeling upset or worried about something. The goal in these, often brief interactions, does not necessarily need to solve a young person’s problem or provide advice, but rather to offer a soft landing in which a young person can be left feeling validated and acknowledged. However small these conversations may be, they provide an opportunity to leave a positive impact on a young person’s mental health and well-being.

This resource uses some suggestions from an emotion coaching approach to offer language and direction when educators are met with conversations that may be difficult to navigate.

Key tips to remember when using an emotion coaching approach:

1. Validating how someone feels and demonstrating that we understand is critical.

2. Once we validate a young person’s feelings, we are better able to help with problem solving and solutions.

3. Use language that feels natural and genuine for you.

For more on supporting positive mental health for students:

Tip sheet for staff to support positive mental health for all students

www.smho-smso.ca
**Loss and disappointment**

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| **Will I get to play sports this year?** | **Validating language:**  
• I can see that you are feeling (sad/disappointed/frustrated/upset) because...  
• I understand why you might feel _______ because you are missing out on an important moment. | **Loss and Grief During the COVID-19 Pandemic**  
(smho-smso.ca) |
| I felt very disappointed that last year they cancelled all social events. | **Solution seeking language:**  
• How can I help?  
• What would you need to feel supported? | **Loss, Grief, and Healing**  
(camh.ca)  
**8 Ways to Celebrate Special Events During the Pandemic**  
(kidshelpphone.ca) |
| I’m in my final year, and my family is hoping to see me...I’m worried it might get cancelled this year too... | | |

**Uncertainty about the future**

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| **Will I have to do another grade via online?** | **Validating language:**  
• This is a challenging time, concerns about your future are completely understandable...  
• I imagine that this must be difficult... | **How I Cope With Change During COVID-19**  
(kidshelphone.ca)  
**Goal Setting in a Year of Uncertainty**  
(mentalhealthcommission.ca) |
| My part time job let me go because of the pandemic. How can I find another job? | **Solution seeking language:**  
• How can I help?  
• I can see how you would feel upset about _______ because. | |
## Living life virtually

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| I am really struggling with learning online. | **Validating language:**  
  - It sounds like you have found it tough with on-line learning because you have missed...  
  - I can understand why you have mixed feelings about virtual or face to face learning because of ______ that can be confusing for sure... |  
  **Supporting Minds Strategies at a Glance**  
  (smho-smso.ca)  
  **Supporting Student Mental Health During a Pandemic (COVID-19)**  
  (smho-smso.ca)  
  **Supported the Mental Health and Well-Being of Students Who Will Return to School Remotely**  
  (smho-smso.ca)  
  **Ways to Ease Concerns About School During COVID-19**  
  (kidshelphone.ca) |
| I don’t know how to make new friends in my on-line classes | **Solution seeking language:**  
  - Let’s look into this together to see if we can find someone to support.  
  - I wonder if we could just brainstorm together some ways to keep in touch with your friends. |  
  **Tips for Staying Connected During COVID-19**  
  (kidshelphone.ca)  
  **How to Cope With Social Distancing During COVID-19**  
  (kidshelphone.ca)  
  **Feeling Lonely? Here Are Some Ways to Feel Better.**  
  (kidshelphone.ca) |
### Substance use

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| There is nothing to do but smoke weed. | **Validating language:**  
- It sounds like you have a lot going on, and I understand why you are worried because ______. I am happy to listen, and I also know some others in our school who could help... | [Cannabis: What Parents/Guardians and Caregivers Need to Know](smho-smso.ca)  
[Cannabis: What Educators Need to Know](smho-smso.ca) |
| All my friends and I have been doing during the pandemic is vaping. There isn’t anything else to do. | **Validating language:**  
- It sounds like you are worried about how you are coping right now because you are smoking more than you have been...  
**Solution seeking language:**  
- I wonder if we could talk to (adult ally), I know ______ knows a lot about this, they may have some ideas where to start ______.  
- Would you be interested in getting some help... | [Student Vaping Resources](smho-smso.ca)  
[Secondary School Teachers Vaping Resource](smho-smso.ca) |

Comments about substance use, gaming or other behaviors may sound like the statements above. Please refer to the [substance use and addiction webpage](www.smho-smso.ca) for more information about responding to these concerns in school.

### Loss of caring connections

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| I have not connected with my school social worker for over a year. I am not sure if the relationship will be the same anymore? | **Validating language:**  
- I hear that you are looking for someone to talk to...  
- I understand why it has been difficult to maintain the same relationships you had before... | [Circle of Support (for educators)](smho-smso.ca)  
[Reaching Out](smho-smso.ca)  
[No Problem Too Big or Too Small](smho-smso.ca)  
[How to Map Out Your Community of Support](kidshelpphone.ca)  
[Resources Around Me](kidshelpphone.ca) |
| I have not seen my friends in over a year. I am worried that our friendships are not the same anymore? | **Solution seeking language:**  
- Let’s see how we can figure this out.  
- What would you need to feel supported? | |