



The Importance of Learning About Mental Health

Mental health is an essential component of overall health. Learning about mental health from a young age and developing skills to support positive mental health throughout their lives will help students to be healthier and more successful. It will also help students build awareness about when and how to access mental health supports, when needed.

By embedding opportunities to learn about mental health in the classroom experience, both through explicit curriculum instruction, and through the inclusion of everyday practices, Ontario educators can contribute to the development of positive mental health of all students. When young people learn to understand, respect and care for their mental health routinely, just as they care for their physical health, they are more likely to reach out for help early if needed. Early identification and early intervention for mental health problems leads to better overall outcomes for young people.

It's important to be aware that speaking about mental health can be difficult for some people. Knowing your students and their experiences, strengths, and needs will help you be aware of who may be more vulnerable to these conversations. Knowing the referral processes for your school board and the supports available in school is essential before engaging in conversations and lessons related to mental health. You – together with their parents/guardians – know your students best. If you are concerned about a student or notice changes in their behaviour that concerns you, follow up with your school administrator.



THIS RESOURCE

In 2019 the Ministry of Education released the updated Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum with an enhanced focus on social-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health literacy. This resource is a collection of lesson plans focused on the mental health literacy expectations outlined in strand D of the updated HPE curriculum. These lessons not only provide examples of explicit instruction related to mental health and social-emotional learning, but also support meaningful dialogue related to student well-being. The focus of the lessons and these materials is currently on instruction of social-emotional learning skills rather than evaluation and reporting. There are opportunities for students to self-reflect about their individual process.

Included in the lessons you will find cross curricular connections with language and the arts. This is not an exhaustive list of cross curricular connections and we encourage educators to explore additional connections to other curriculum in addition to other HPE strands. Suggested mentor texts are provided as an option for extending learning. This collection of mentor texts focus on themes related to mental health and social-emotional learning and are representative of the diversity of Ontario students. The lessons have been prepared so that they are appropriate for either in person instruction or can be easily adapted for virtual learning environments.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND PLANNING FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND RELEVANT INSTRUCTION

Throughout the lesson plans, as with the HPE curriculum, you will see tags for connections to social-emotional learning. As stated in the 2019 HPE curriculum, “the development of social-emotional learning skills supports students’ overall health and well-being. It also supports positive mental health, as well as their ability to learn, build resilience, and thrive” (p. vi). Approaches to all instruction, including Social-Emotional Learning skills, must be mediated through reflection and consideration of students’ lived realities, inequity, bias, discrimination and harassment.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING SKILLS AT A GLANCE

Students will learn skills to:	So they can:
identify and manage emotions	express their feelings and understand the feelings of others
recognize sources of stress and cope with challenges	develop personal resilience
maintain positive motivation and perseverance	foster a sense of optimism and hope
build relationships and communicate effectively	support healthy relationships and respect diversity
develop self-awareness and sense of identity	develop a sense of identity and belonging
think critically and creatively	make informed decisions and solve problems

For a more detailed overview please see Appendix A of the 2019 HPE Curriculum: (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/2019-health-physical-education-grades-1to8.pdf>).



For instruction about SEL to be impactful, supportive, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive, the teaching and learning approach must consider and address the lived realities, racial and other disparities and educator biases that can impact students' experiences in Ontario schools.

It is important when co-constructing success criteria with your students, that individual, family and community cultural contexts be considered. We encourage educators to not only reflect meaningfully on their personal bias, but also enhance their awareness of the systemic barriers that many students face and must navigate every day. It is crucial that educators create an open environment where all perspectives and identities are valued and reflected in instruction and honours a range of lived experiences of students. For instruction to attend to Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy, address anti-Black racism and anti-discriminatory frames, learning activities need to be designed and delivered so that they are reflective of the diversity of student experiences, contexts and realities in schools.

