



ONE-CALL Desk Top Reference

Expanded Version for Remote Learning



School
Mental Health
Ontario

Santé mentale
en milieu scolaire
Ontario

www.smho-smso.ca



YOU make a difference

Students make school come alive. It is not the walls of the building that make a school, it is the magic that happens amongst students and educators. Learning can occur anywhere if students are engaged, valued, connected, excited, and eager to learn.

- When educators spend time getting to know their students, they build trusting relationships that can enhance wellness and belonging at school. This is especially important for remote classrooms, where it can be challenging to connect in ways we would in the physical classroom. Taking time to learn about student strengths, identities, and interests can help with determining what each student needs to successfully engage with the virtual classroom.
- When students are learning remotely, educators have a significant role to play in nurturing the social and emotional growth of each student. This happens informally, through day-to-day interactions, and explicitly through opportunities to practice culturally-responsive social emotional skills. For example, educators can remind students about strategies to respond to stress, such as brief relaxation techniques that the whole virtual class can practice. Educators can also invite students to share specific strategies that work for them outside of school (e.g., listen to music, talk with friends, meet up with a faith or cultural group).
- Educators can create space each day for students to share how they are doing, what they are learning at home, or new hobbies they have tried. Validating experiences that highlight how learning happens all around, and affirms identities, can help students to stay mentally well while learning away from the school building.
- There are special considerations for promoting wellness while students are learning remotely. For example, spending the full school day in front of a screen is difficult, so it is important to help students to break up the day with healthy movement, and to find ways to balance screen time with alternative activities.
- The virtual classroom requires intentional set up to help students to express themselves comfortably when others are watching them on screen. This takes practice and good planning! For example, logistical details like use of a virtual background or headphones can help with worries about privacy and may boost engagement. Classroom norms that encourage appropriate risk-taking, engagement with choice (e.g., use of camera, chat function, and/or asynchronous participation) and appreciation for effort can help student's feel comfortable. As educators, it is important to be mindful of the diverse make up of each classroom and school community and be open to the multiple ways in which students, parents/caregivers and community members express themselves.
- You make a difference, even though you may never know exactly how your efforts will help shape the life of a student. In the future, your students may share with others that it was YOU who changed their life. Your caring support matters and can make all the difference for a young person.



Signs to watch for

In the remote classroom, it may be more challenging to notice when changes in a student's behaviour or emotions are occurring. It can be a little harder to get to know students, especially when they are reluctant to be on camera or participate fully in class. You may need to take additional time to learn about each student – focusing on their tone of voice, how they express themselves, and their non-verbal cues – to recognize changes that arise. As an educator supporting learning at home, you do have regular contact with students and are well-positioned to notice when they may be struggling with a mental health problem, if you know what to watch for. Taking a proactive approach to connect with students individually can help you to know your students and recognize when they may need more support.

Although educators play a significant role in identifying signs of potential mental health problems, they do not work alone. There are many people in a student's circle of support who have a role to play such as the student's parent/caregiver and extended family, allies, other school staff, and involved mental health professionals. A team approach helps to ensure that students and their parent/caregiver understand how to access the right support at the right time. Due to the limitations associated with observing the student within the virtual classroom, it is so much more important to consult with school team members, parents/guardians, and the student themselves to share what you observe and to see if others have also noticed a change that might need further attention. When we notice signs of a mental health problem, we are better able to intervene early, which can help mild or emerging problems from becoming more serious. While educators are not mental health professionals, you have a role to play in supporting students with emotional difficulties towards needed services.



Common signs of a mental health problem:*

Changes in Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saying negative things about themselves or blaming themselves for things beyond their control• Difficulty with concentration• Lack of motivation (i.e., “what’s the point?”)• Sense of being overwhelmed, paralyzed• Loss of interest in engaging in learning• Unusual or bizarre assertions or perspectives
Changes in Feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reactions or feelings that seem bigger than the situation• Seeming very unhappy, worried, guilty, fearful, irritable, or angry• Describes feeling lonely, isolated, excluded or judged• Sense of hopelessness, or helplessness• Worried about maintaining relationships with their peers
Changes in Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Change in level of virtual class participation (camera/mic off)• Unexplained changes in attendance pattern• Daydreaming a lot• Cannot manage time to complete schoolwork virtually• Over-reacting, or sudden outbursts of anger or tears• Notable change in appearance, clothing, hygiene• Trouble relaxing or sleeping/sleeping longer periods, excessive yawning• Logging on late to virtual class• Quieter than usual, less energetic• Withdrawing from activities that are normally enjoyed• Low mood• Restlessness, agitation• Argumentative and problems with relationships
Physical Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complaints about headaches, stomach aches, neck pain• Lack of energy or appearing tired all the time• Weight gain or loss• Sleeping or eating difficulties• Unable to stay awake during lesson, tired eyes• Too much energy or nervous habits such as nail biting, hair twisting or thumb-sucking, leg shaking, biting lips, irritated skin, scratching, tics, excessive sweating

*This is not an exhaustive list



When you notice signs of a problem



Noticing one or more of these changes does not necessarily mean a student has a mental health problem. As noted, it is easy to miss or misunderstand a student’s behaviour or emotions in the virtual classroom because there are not as many visual cues and close interactions as in the regular school building. A first step in recognizing whether a student is having difficulty may simply begin by documenting the behaviour that is causing concern. School boards may have their own forms on which to record this information.

The three indicators shared below can assist you as an educator in noticing that a student may be struggling with a mental health problem that might require support. Consider the following:

Frequency: How often does the student exhibit the behaviour or emotion?

Duration: How long does the behaviour last? Does the duration of the behaviour appear to be excessive?

Intensity: To what extent does the behaviour interfere with the student’s social, emotional, and academic functioning?

Other general signs that a student may be struggling are when the student’s emotions and behaviour are not age appropriate, and the behaviour seems different from that of the student’s peers.

One-Call Desk Top Reference (Remote Learners)

The ONE-CALL approach to supporting students when they exhibit signs of a mental health problem can be a helpful reminder of the steps educators can take in providing support.

O

Observe: Learn about your students' typical behaviour and responses. When educators know their students, they are well positioned to observe changes in thoughts, feelings, or actions. In remote classrooms this is an area that requires greater attention because you are less able to see the student in different settings or in daily social interactions with their peers. Knowing your students requires intentional connection with students to learn more through conversation and relies on a keen eye to notice changes.

N

Notice: Notice changes in a student's behaviour or mood that are different from their usual way of being. Refer to the common signs noted above to guide you. Sometimes when students show signs of difficulty, they may be showing us they need additional support because of an emerging mental health problem.

E

Explore: Seek out information about the signs you are observing (e.g., access School Mental Health Ontario MH LIT courses, tutorials, and info sheets). In addition, consider reaching out to your school support services staff to explore, and deepen your knowledge in understanding what you are observing.

C

Connect: Make a connection with the student to see if they are open to a conversation. Consider connecting to others in the circle of support (parents/caregivers/allies, school administration, other teachers who may know the student). Collaboration is even more critical for the student struggling in the virtual classroom because you are not able to talk face to face quickly with other teachers, administrators, etc. in exploring ways to problem solve and support. Connecting with the parent and caregiver to assess your observation is important.

A

Ask: Ask the student how you can help, and or how you can support them. This action demonstrates caring and kind support. You may say, "I know that there are lots of reasons why you may have stopped using your camera and participating in class, but I wanted to check in to be sure everything is okay" or "I have noticed that you are falling behind in your assignments, and that hasn't happened before. You also seem tired and not quite yourself. Is there something getting in the way?"

L

Listen: Actively listen to the student and validate their experience. On the virtual platform, listening requires a lot of attention to tone, inflection, and intensity of words used, especially if the student's camera is off. Actively listening to students is very validating and encourages students to express their thoughts openly because they feel heard.

L

Link: Link students to other supports in the school, board, or community where appropriate. Knowing what is available in your school board and the pathway to more intensive services is important. It is also helpful to have a sense of how to access supports for students in the virtual classroom who identify with particular cultural/faith or other groups, this can help to affirm and strengthen identity and wellness. Follow the same guidelines as you would in the physical classroom, and consult with your principal, board Mental Health Leader or school-based mental health professional for assistance as needed.



Ask yourself:



- Who in my school can provide support? For virtual classrooms, do I know the pathway to connect with the appropriate support services staff? How do I access the school services pathway?
- When should I reach out to parents/ caregivers/families and others that the student identifies as an ally with my observations?
- What should I consider when approaching parents or caregivers? (e.g., identity, culture, language, social location, sexual orientation, faith).
- Am I considering the whole child?
- Do I have access to the emergency contact for students learning virtually? Do I have a backup number if the emergency contact is not available? Do I have back up contact information for students if I cannot reach their parent/caregiver?
- Do I know the steps to take if a student expresses suicidal thoughts while online and then logs off?
- Who is/are the mental health professionals for my school or attached to my virtual classroom?
- Who is my board's Mental Health Leader?
- Who can help to make a connection to community agencies?
- What is the process for making contact with each of the above?



Starter statements

Here is an example of a strategy to support students during difficult moments.

Notice, Respond and Prevent	<p>Validate: Hear their concerns and put their feeling about the problem into words (name and describe it)</p> <p>Start with: Conveying an understanding of their experience with the problem “It would make sense that...you wouldn’t want to participate in class virtually because...” “When I put myself in your shoes, I could imagine that...you are feeling really frustrated that you lost your work on the computer...”</p> <p>Then add: A few specific examples to let them know you “get it” (the problem). Give 2-3 reasons that demonstrate why you understand (refrain from using “but”). Instead, using the first example, try: because (reason 1): “...you are feeling shy” and because (reason 2): “...virtual school can be hard.”</p> <p><i>* Be aware of non-verbal cues (such as body language and tone). Vary the language to match what you know will resonate with them.</i></p>
Support and Bolster Skills	<p>Finish with: Words of Support and a Helping Hand</p> <p>Words of Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “We’re in this together” (Positive connection)• “I get it” (Feeling heard)• “Let’s see if we can figure this out” (Reassurance) <p>A Helping Hand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Redirect, if appropriate• Work together to brainstorm a solution• Reminder to use their coping strategies (e.g., deep breathing, screen break, check in with friends, etc.)
Bridge	<p>As a key player in the circle of support, you can connect students to services when needed. Refer to your school’s service pathway. Also consider culturally diverse services, as identify affirming groups and activities can be very valuable in light of more limited social opportunity in the virtual setting.</p>

With acknowledgment to Adele LaFrance for use of the concepts from Emotion Coaching.





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school districts to support student
mental health**

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