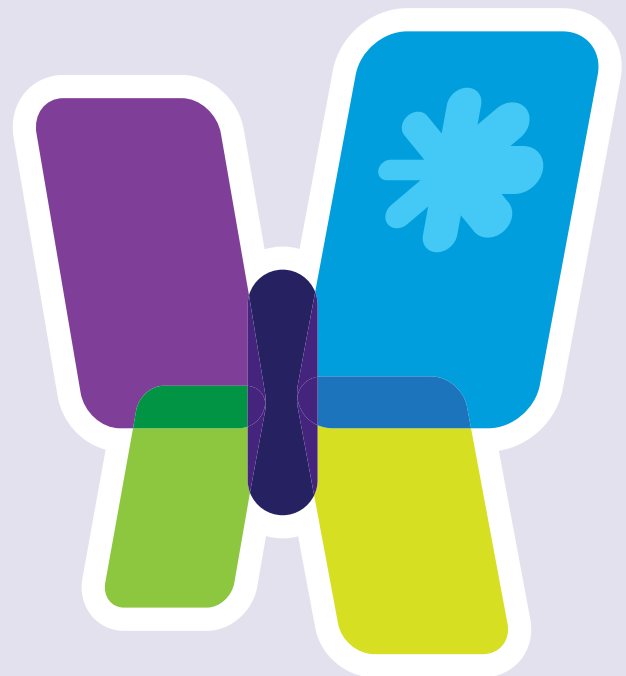


Student Mental Health in Action

The Challenge of Change: Navigating the Transition from Secondary School

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Grades 9 – 12

Lesson plan

This is an expansion lesson for [MH LIT: Student Mental Health in Action](#), a core series of four lessons designed to help students acquire 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 practise/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.

This expansion lesson about transitions from secondary school follows the same format. It is best offered after the core lessons to ensure students have a grounding in mental health literacy. However, it may be used independently with proper scaffolding (e.g., an introductory conversation about mental health, suggestions for healthy strategies to support it, where to find help and how to connect, places to learn more).

BIG IDEAS

Students

Students learn and share skills and strategies to prepare for the transition from secondary school.

Educators

Creating an inclusive, identity-affirming space for students goes beyond what happens in the learning environment. It extends to the way we talk about the future, how we frame post-secondary plans, and what experiences we hold up as examples of success. It is important to be aware of our bias because implicit bias is present in all of us—our backgrounds, attitudes, and stereotypes unconsciously affect our perceptions, actions, and decisions. Consider the following questions to help you reflect on and improve your practices:

- ▶ As an educator, what can I do to be aware of the privileges I hold that inform my biases?
- ▶ What can I do to identify and acknowledge my biases? And how can I begin dismantling them once I am aware of them?
- ▶ Am I open to receiving feedback that my biases are affecting others or that I have unintentionally caused harm?



- ▶ Do I challenge stereotypes and intervene when I see discriminatory behaviour or others causing harm?
- ▶ Am I proactive in learning about other groups of people and cultures in a respectful and appropriate way? Am I proactive in learning about social justice issues and how they impact people's experiences that differ from mine?
- ▶ What version of success am I portraying as an educator? Whose version of success am I projecting when I talk about post-secondary options? How do I acknowledge experiences and versions of success that may differ from my own?
- ▶ Am I maintaining high expectations for every student?
- ▶ Do I recognize or seek to understand all students' strengths and lived experiences?

Note: How am I helping students to “know themselves” including their interests, strengths, accomplishments, and skills? [Education and Career/Life Planning Program](#) (ontario.ca)

In sharing the practises within this module, as educators and caring adults you can help students to prepare for transitions from secondary school and to manage associated stress that might arise. This lesson has intentionally been framed broadly and does not focus on graduation as the sole reason students move on from secondary school. This is so that all students might be able to find a place in the conversation, including those who, for a variety of complex reasons and barriers, do not graduate in the traditional way. Where possible, provide entry points to the conversation that acknowledge the many ways students may transition from secondary school and the many pathways that may lie ahead.

Also, note that students who may leave secondary school without graduating may need particular support during the transition as the same barriers that impacted opportunities for graduation may also affect their ability to find a positive path forward. At times this may mean helping students to access mental health services and supports. They may benefit from close connections with caring adults at school and advance planning to help them navigate and access future supports.

Note: Our goal as educators is to help students “make a smooth transition to their first postsecondary destination, whether in apprenticeship training, college, community living, university or the workplace” [Education and career planning](#) (ontario.ca).



LEARNING GOALS	SUCCESS CRITERIA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of transition on mental health and well-being. • Normalize stress related to change. • Increase knowledge needed to care for well-being during times of transition. • Increase understanding of how well-being strategies can support future goals. • Improve understanding of when mental health concerns exceed those typical of transition and it is time to seek support. 	<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 anticipate and prepare for stress related to change. • I can practise, observe, and apply strategies to manage transition-related stress and help me succeed in my goals. • I can challenge and manage expectations related to graduation/moving on from secondary school. • I know when, where, and how to reach out for support, if I need it.
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. • 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. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ONE-CALL Desk Reference (smho-smso.ca) - Talking with Parents and Families about Mental Health (smho-smso.ca) - Circle of Support and System Pathways – Flowchart (smho-smso.ca) <p>For more suggestions for delivering the series of lessons, see the Educator preparation suggestions for MH LIT: Student Mental Health in Action resource.</p>	



SETTING THE STAGE

Remind students of the “ground rules” or shared agreements established during [Lesson 1: Know the Facts](#) or, if this lesson is being used as a stand-alone, introduce the conversation here and spend a few minutes talking about what students need to feel comfortable discussing mental health. Before collaboratively creating some “ground rules” or shared agreements to guide the discussion, you may wish to give students a few examples to help elevate the different needs, goals, and perspectives of all students, including those with a variety of different identities. Some options include:

- ▶ Keep the focus on mental health facts and information, rather than sharing sensitive personal stories.
- ▶ 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.

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 transitioning from secondary school and moving on to whatever they are pursuing next (e.g., on sticky notes, through a virtual tool, such as a virtual whiteboard, word cloud, or orally with a partner). Choose the method that best suits your learning situation and the needs of students.

Ask students to consider their responses:

- ▶ What was the tone of the words shared (e.g., positive, negative, indifferent)?
- ▶ Did they describe stress related to moving on from secondary school?
- ▶ Did they share a mixture of both types of words?

Teacher prompt: “Many students are excited about moving on from secondary school. It’s an important stage and something they’ve been working toward most of their lives. Exploring a new path can definitely be exciting. However, it’s important to acknowledge that it can be stressful, too.”

Before beginning the main content of the lesson, it may also be helpful to acknowledge the many pathways students may take after secondary school and have a discussion about differing versions of success and that each is valid.



ACTION TASK

Introduction to transition: The Action Task is a discussion of the impact of transition on mental health and well-being. It helps students understand that change (even good change) can be stressful. It also helps students consider how they look at stress, learn strategies to manage it, and know when they might need more support.

What is stress?

Teacher prompt: “Everyone experiences stress. It’s the feeling we get when pressures and demands are put on us. We often think of stress as something we’d like to avoid—like when we feel unable to handle situations, helpless, or worried about what is going to happen. But stress can also be positive and even helpful—like when we feel we can deal with a situation and handling it makes us feel like we are capable, learning, and growing. A certain amount of stress also helps motivate us to develop positive ways of coping and to solve problems. It helps us perform our best. Think about it. Would you put down your phone and study if you weren’t at least a little stressed about an upcoming test? **The key is to keep stress in a range that works for us. Too little stress and we lack motivation and focus. Too much, and we get exhausted and overwhelmed.**”

Acknowledgement: [From Surviving to Thriving](#) (mediresource.com)

Student reflection:

- ▶ Can you think of a time when you experienced stress that was helpful (e.g., stress that worked for you or motivated you)?
- ▶ What made the stress helpful to you?

Why is transition stressful?

Kahoot poll

Teacher prompt: “It can feel confusing to look forward to moving on from secondary school and then find parts of the experience stressful when it arrives. We may wonder if we’ve made the right choices or if we are handling things well. But it’s okay to feel some stress related to transition—in fact, it’s to be expected, and those feelings are just as valid as our excitement.”

Share the following with students:

- ▶ Moving on from secondary school is a big life transition. A life transition is any major life event that alters our sense of self, our purpose, and how we go from day to day. (Source of definition: Jennifer Katzenstein, PhD)
- ▶ Change—even good change we are looking forward to—can cause stress. Even things like getting a promotion at work or taking a vacation can cause stress because they require us to adapt and grow.
- ▶ Some students may not feel ready to move on from secondary school and were still hoping for more from the experience (e.g., more time with friends, more time in the classroom, more time to make memories, more time to prepare for what is coming next).



- ▶ Students often see an idealized version of what life 'should' look like after secondary school and receive messages that they are lucky to experience this phase of life or that this is the best time of their lives.
- ▶ There are also many life events outside of our control that can add to the amount of change we deal with and the stress we need to manage.

Ask students to briefly brainstorm what makes moving on from secondary school both exciting and challenging. [Appendix A](#) is provided to help guide the discussion and a [Kahoot poll](#) is offered as an additional way to explore the topic (educators should also feel free to use alternative polling methods such as standing/sitting as students are able, a dotmocracy, or emojis, should they wish).

Acknowledge all contributions and note that, while a number of things may be common among students, there are also many individual factors (e.g., environment, history, and life events) that will make each person's experience unique. Although it is a change for everyone, it can look different for different people. Students may be graduating, moving away from home to attend a new school, continuing to live at home, returning to secondary school for additional courses, starting new jobs, and so on. There are many pathways to success.

Teacher prompt: "We can't always choose whether we experience stress, but we can choose how we get ready for it. And instead of reacting to it, we can be intentional about how we respond when it appears. That's what we're going to learn more about today. I would also encourage you to think about the people we have in our school to help you plan for your future, such as our guidance staff. Reach out to them early and often! Reach out to other people in your life who are there to help, too, such as your parents/caregivers, mentors, Elders, coaches, and other trusted adults."

Educator note: it may be helpful to continue to provide reminders throughout the lesson about help available as students work toward graduation.

How can we manage stress?

Personal Stress Management Plan – Graphic Organizer

Teacher prompt: "We know healthy transitions often involve some stress, so what can we do about it? How can we get ready for and manage stress, so it works for us and helps us achieve our goals, instead of working against us? Here are some strategies that can help."

Share these three steps that students can use:

- ▶ **Step 1:** Anticipate and get ready for stress
- ▶ **Step 2:** Manage stress early when it appears
- ▶ **Step 3:** Seek support when you need it

Ask students to brainstorm what might be involved in each step using [Appendix B](#) to help guide the discussion. A [Personal Stress Management Plan](#) is also provided for students to record ideas and personal strategies. Acknowledge all contributions and note different strategies work for different people and each person's plan will be unique.



Teacher prompt: “Throughout our discussion, record your ideas and thoughts in your Personal Stress Management Plan. You may wish to reflect on moments when you have experienced stress in the past, how you managed it, and who and what supported you. You can also add new ideas you discover in this lesson. This will help you develop a personal list of strategies you can take away to use when you need it.”

Note: The Personal Stress Management Plan is not for submission. It is for personal reflection only.

Breathing exercise

Circular breathing video

Should you wish to end with a brief opportunity to practise stress management, you may invite students to take a deep breath. Deep breathing can help still our minds, calm our bodies, and manage feelings of stress. The following video is offered to guide you.

Additional stress management activities are available here: [Mental Health Literacy and Anxiety Management Social Media Bundles](https://smho-smso.ca/mental-health-literacy-and-anxiety-management-social-media-bundles) (smho-smso.ca)

Pathway stress

Kahoot poll

Balanced Thought Journal – Graphic Organizer

Teacher prompt: “One source of stress that can come with transitioning out of high school is the pressure to choose the perfect pathway. That can involve things like the following:

- ▶ Many students find it challenging to manage personal expectations (e.g., achieving certain grades, getting into a certain program or getting a certain job, feeling that their decision about what they want to pursue after secondary school is permanent or not easily changed).
- ▶ Students also often have to handle pressure from others (e.g., parent/caregiver encouragement to make certain career choices).
- ▶ In secondary school, a competitive environment can sometimes exist (e.g., when applying for post-secondary programs or to jobs with limited spots available).
- ▶ Students following a path that doesn’t immediately include going to post-secondary school can feel different or left out.

Note: The pressure to pick the perfect pathway may be experienced differently by different students. For example, due to historic and current systemic racism, racialized students sometimes report needing to excel just to be considered for opportunities others readily receive. This can place increased pressure on them. Newcomer students whose families have relocated or been displaced may also experience increased pressure to succeed academically, for a variety of complex reasons. Knowing students, and showing sensitivity in your examples, can help to ensure that conversations respect the values and experiences of every student in the class.

Teacher prompt: “We’re going to complete an activity to help you consider a balanced way to think about the pathway choice and some of the related pressures. Looking at things in a balanced way involves noticing all aspects of a situation—the positive, negative, and neutral, not just the ones you are stressed about.”



Use the [Kahoot](#) provided and [Appendix C](#) to engage students in a group conversation about balanced thinking (educators may opt to capture and share students' ideas in other ways, should they wish, such as with a virtual whiteboard, or physical paper snowball activity). The group format allows students to brainstorm ways to challenge and “talk back” to unhelpful thoughts together, which may be challenging for some students. Anonymous ways to contribute may allow students to connect without feeling spotlighted (if using a virtual tool, remind students it is not a space for sensitive personal disclosures; use built in screening tools to moderate student responses prior to sharing them with the larger group).

Ask students to consider the unbalanced set of thoughts.

- ▶ Can students relate to them?
- ▶ Are the thoughts really true?
- ▶ What evidence do they have?
- ▶ Is there a more balanced way to think about things?

Invite students to offer more balanced thoughts to counter the unbalanced ones. A [Balanced Thought Journal](#) is also provided so students may record ways to challenge their thoughts that they can take away to refer to later.

Note: The Balanced Thought Journal is not for submission. It is for personal reflection only.

Optional educator resources:

- ▶ [Secondary School Thought Changing Virtual Field Trip](#) (smho-smso.ca)
- ▶ [Transitioning into Post-Secondary Education Info Sheet](#) (campusmentalhealth.ca)

CONSOLIDATION

Slide deck

Teacher prompt: “We are going to create a message to your next year self. Think about where you may be and what you may be doing. Then create yourself a message of support.”

Suggest students may wish to include some of the following:

- ▶ reminders of how they have gotten through challenging times in the past and the strategies they used
- ▶ reminders that sometimes things haven't turned out the way they expected and that it was okay and even led to learning, growth, and other positive outcomes
- ▶ support managing their expectations
- ▶ reminders of their strengths, things that they can be proud of, and encouraging words
- ▶ acknowledgement of positives, even if they are not what students had hoped for or expected



In preparation, you may wish to share this [slide deck](#) that offers students wisdom through the experiences of those who have already been where they are. The inspirational quotes provide reassurance that students don't have to have everything figured out and that there are many pathways to a full and rewarding future.

Teacher prompt: “I’m going to share a sample letter, but you can write one all your own. If you prefer, you can create an audio message or video for yourself, too. The important thing is that you offer yourself some compassion and encouragement, whatever format you choose. And remember the words of those who have already been through this experience. You don’t have to have everything figured out and sometimes, new pathways lead great places.”

Share the sample letter provided in [Appendix D](#) with students and provide time for them to create their own message. If students wish, they can use an online site that allows them to create and send a message to themselves or send themselves their letter in an email by specifying a future send date of their choosing.

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 change and transition?

Key messages:

- ▶ Change—even good change we are looking forward to—can cause stress.
- ▶ Everyone experiences stress and there are strategies that can help manage it. (such as challenging negative thoughts, or practising grounding and stress management strategies, like we did together today)
- ▶ Different strategies may work at different times, so it’s important to have a few options available.
- ▶ When we don’t get a break from stress, it can impact our mental and physical health.
- ▶ When that starts to happen, it’s time to seek support.

TRANSITION

Personal wellness

Teacher prompt: “I encourage you to participate in an activity that helps you recharge at some point today—something you enjoy that gives you a sense of well-being.”

You may wish to offer a quick grounding activity as you wrap up the lesson. Grounding is a set of strategies used to help detach from difficult emotions. It does not seek to solve a problem. It offers a way to help students gain control over an emotional moment.

Teacher prompt: “Before you move on with the rest of your day I invite you, as you are able, to place your left hand on your right shoulder and your right hand on your left shoulder. Then give yourself a gentle squeeze as you silently think a few words that offer you support and encouragement, speak to your goals or dreams, or motivate or inspire you. Some examples are: I like who I am becoming. I am doing my best. I am not my grades. I deserve help and support. Use whatever words are meaningful to you.”



Optional video: This guided meditation activity is available in video format, making it easy for you and students to use. [Appendix E](#) also provides the script, should an educator wish to read it instead of using the video.

Teacher prompt: “We are going to close this section with a brief guided meditation exercise. The activity asks you to think of the people, places, and things that support you. You may close your eyes and imagine, or watch the video, if you prefer.”

Guided Meditation video

Additional optional student resources:

- ▶ [How to calm down when you're stressed](#) (kidshelpphone.ca)
- ▶ [Thought changing exercises social media bundles](#) (smho-smso.ca)
- ▶ [Grounding techniques social media bundles](#) (smho-smso.ca)

Note: Students may request information about stress-related apps. It can be challenging to select mental health apps as there are so many available options. Educators may find considerations and cautions to help guide this discussion within the “Mental Health Apps” section of the [School Mental Health Decision Support Tool: Student Mental Health Awareness Initiatives; Version for School Administrators](#) (smho-smso.ca).

Optional educator resources:

- ▶ [Secondary Thought-changing Virtual Field Trip](#) (smho-smso.ca)
- ▶ A resource to support educator well-being: [Stress Strategies](#) (stressstrategies.ca)

SUPPORT

Teacher prompt: “While there are many things we can do to help during stressful situations, we can’t and we don’t control everything, and sometimes things get in the way of our ability to manage. Our ability to manage stress can also be impacted by things such as loss, health or financial issues, how safe we feel, and many others. If you try the strategies discussed and they aren’t helping, or if your stress is really big, long-lasting, and getting in the way of your day-to-day life, you don’t have to manage alone. There are people who can help and remember, you deserve support. If you aren’t sure how to start the conversation, you can use words such as these:

- ▶ Something has been bothering me. Can you help me find someone to talk to about it?
- ▶ I’ve been feeling stressed a lot lately. Can I talk to you about it?
- ▶ Do you have some time to meet with me? There’s something I need help with.

Introduce students to [My Circle of Support – Student Help-Seeking Resource](#) (smho-smso.ca).



Teacher prompt: “This resource can help you identify the people, places, and things that are there to support you when you need it, both now and during the transition from secondary school, too. It’s important to update your circle of support list from time to time. As you follow your path, you will meet new people who may become strong allies and supports for you. Add them to your circle of support list! And if you travel to new places, pay attention to formal mental health services, too. There is always help through any tough time you might experience.”

Remind students that, if they are feeling unwell (e.g., overwhelmed, anxious, sad) for any reason, they can talk to you or another adult they trust. There are people who work in schools, and in the community, who are there to help them find ways to feel better. Provide them with the resource list and encourage help-seeking. Let them know that older youth use the resources below, too. For example, more than a quarter of young people who call Kids Help Phone are 18-24 years of age (28% as of data capture September 2024: [Get Insights – Kids Help Phone](#)).

If students express sadness about the changes after secondary school that may occur within their friendship circles, you may wish to add the following:

“Remember, people come into your life for a season, a reason, or a lifetime. As you follow your path, spend time with those who build you up, make you laugh, and support you when times are tough. Some of those people may be in the room with you right now and may be lifelong friends. You will meet new people along the way, too, who will help enrich your life and you will enrich theirs.”

<p>Kids Help Phone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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) 	<p>LGBT Youth Line</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
<p>Black Youth Helpline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call: 416-285-9944 or toll-free 1-833-294-8650 • Multicultural youth helpline serving all youth • Services available in English 	<p>One Stop Talk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call: 1-855-416 8255 • Chat: onestoptalk.ca • Available to anyone under age 18 in Ontario • Services available in English and French • One hour of free professional therapy; referral for more support when needed



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)

9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline

- Call or text 988
- Available to anyone across Canada
- Services available in English and French

* Service availability varies, check the website for availability in your time zone

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 of washroom stall doors also offer privacy.





Appendix A

Transitioning from Secondary School Discussion Guide

Note: Focusing on challenges may be discouraging for some students. Share a limited number of examples and balance the discussion with what makes transitioning from secondary school exciting. In addition, educators should be mindful that certain communities may disproportionately experience challenges due to historical and current systemic racism.

TRANSITIONING FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL DISCUSSION GUIDE

Exciting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finishing grade school/getting a diploma • moving on to something new and different • prom and other special events • greater independence • the chance to focus more on what you like/are interested in • going away for school or work • anticipating meeting new people and having new experiences • a feeling of closure • feeling one step closer to the future you want
Challenging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lots of decisions to make <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - choosing a career path, where to apply for school or a job, where to live, who to live with, etc. • personal issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - becoming more independent - figuring out your identity and who you want to be - peer pressure, body image worries, issues with parents/caregivers



TRANSITIONING FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL DISCUSSION GUIDE**Challenging**

- pressures and worries
 - **pressure to “grow up”**
 - **competition to get into certain programs/certain jobs**
 - **maintaining or improving your grades**
 - **high expectations for success from your family**
 - **high expectations for success from yourself**
 - **concerns about finances and how to pay for everything**
 - **thinking about the changes coming (e.g., new school, new city, new living space, new job, new people, more independence, more bills, more responsibilities, being away from family, etc.)**
 - **worries about whether you will achieve personal goals (e.g., graduating, getting into certain programs, getting certain jobs, getting scholarships/awards to support you, and so on)**
 - **worries about friendship groups changing**
- being too busy
 - **homework**
 - **family responsibilities**
 - **college/university/job applications**
 - **jobs**
 - **clubs, sports, and other activities**
 - **graduation and prom**





Appendix B

Transition Stress Discussion Guide

STEP	PROMPTS	DISCUSSION POINTS
Get ready	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kinds of things could you do to get ready to transition from secondary school? What helps you be at your best, so you are better able to manage challenges? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenge your thinking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider how you view and interpret stress. Anticipate and plan for transition stress. Try to see it as a natural reaction to change that can be helpful. Re-evaluate and reframe your ideas of what success after secondary school looks like (e.g., focus on doing your best rather than needing to meet a specific mark/goal). Build healthy habits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop healthy habits now that will support you (e.g., eating, sleeping, exercise, wellness strategies). Prioritize what you can. Know your boundaries and give yourself permission to say “no” when you need to. Try to set reasonable expectations for yourself. Know your supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build a circle of social support. Strive for balanced relationships rather than those that are one-sided. Know the resources available to you (even before you might need them).



STEP	PROMPTS	DISCUSSION POINTS
Manage stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can you tell you are starting to get stressed so you can begin using strategies early? What helps you manage stress when it appears? How have you managed stress in the past? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and rely on your strengths. Try to focus on them rather than areas in need of improvement when managing stress. While it can be tempting to use unhealthy coping strategies when we are stressed, they don't help in the long run. Use the healthy strategies you identified in Lesson 3: Help Yourself. Make sure you have some strategies available that aren't place-based and can be practised anywhere (e.g., breathing, journaling, music). Make time for your strategies regularly. Use routine. Try to keep some familiar routines in place while you create new ones. Creating new routines can take time and having something predictable around us while this happens can be comforting. Stay connected to others. We sometimes retreat when we are stressed, but it can help to share our stress with others. Identify who the most important people in your life are and find ways to stay connected. At the same time, be proactive about adding new people to your support network. Although it's important to stay connected, it's okay to stay away from people who create a stressful environment for you, when you can. Focus on the things you can control. This will help balance out the new, more unknown things that come along with change. Give yourself a break when you need one, including a break from social media. When we use it, we tend to compare the low points of our own lives to the high points of everyone else's, which doesn't help our stress level. Be kind to yourself and remind yourself it takes time to get used to new things. You are in unknown territory and so you won't have all the answers. And that's okay! Give yourself permission to go slowly and take the time you need to get used to the changes occurring. Remind yourself it's a time of learning, growth, and personal development. The way you talk to yourself about change can influence how you feel about it.



STEP	PROMPTS	DISCUSSION POINTS
Seek support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you know what you are feeling was more than the usual stress that comes with transition? • How would you know it was time to reach out for support? • Where could you go to find resources and supports after secondary school? • How could you normalize reaching out for support? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While stress is part of everyday life and it can be healthy, we aren't meant to experience it all the time. We are meant to deal with it and then have a chance to recover. When we experience stress that lasts a long time, it can lead to mental and physical health problems, or it can make existing mental or physical health problems worse. • If you feel stressed all the time, you have felt that way for a long time (two weeks or more), and it is getting in the way of what you need to do and your enjoyment of your life, it is probably time to reach out for support. • You can use the same strategies to reach out provided in Lesson 3: Help Yourself. • If your stress level is okay now but you find you need support after secondary school, there are many resources on most college and university campuses and in many workplace settings. • Don't wait for a crisis to seek support. Know your potential resources and use them if you need to. • Accessing support doesn't mean you don't belong in the program or job you are in, you won't be successful, you will have to go home, or you have let anyone down including yourself! It's a healthy way to help yourself be successful. • Remind yourself how good it can feel to help others. Many people will welcome the opportunity to help you when they can.





Appendix C

Balanced Self-talk Activity

This activity is designed to help you challenge some messages you may give yourself that aren't helpful. As you rethink the way you speak to yourself, consider what you would say to a friend. Most of us offer our friends far more compassion and support than we offer ourselves. In fact, most of us would never be friends with someone who spoke to us the way we sometimes speak to ourselves. We deserve the same kind of compassion and support we show others.

Ask yourself...

- ▶ How likely is this?
- ▶ What can I control?
- ▶ What will I do if this happens?
- ▶ What would I say to a friend?

INSTEAD OF... (UNBALANCED THOUGHTS)	I COULD TRY... (BALANCED THOUGHTS)
If I don't get the job I want, my life will be ruined.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are more options now than ever before. Many people like jobs that are different from what they first thought. • My happiness in life will come from many things. Work is only one of them.
If I don't go to college/university, I'm a failure in life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I know what I want to do and will work hard to make it happen, but there isn't a single path to success. It's different for everyone. • My worth as a person doesn't depend on what I'm studying, my educational success, or what job I have.
Grade 11 is when I need to make all the decisions that will impact the rest of my life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm doing my best to choose a path that makes sense, but I'm going to learn a lot as I try new things. It's okay to change my mind if, once I have more information, I find something that is a better fit for me. • Decisions for post-secondary are not permanent. I'm never stuck. Many people change paths.
There is one right choice and I need to figure it out. Everything else would be a huge mistake.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no one perfect career. People don't have one job their entire lives anymore, either. • Many people shift and change programs and jobs once they try them out. I won't truly know how much I like or don't like a program or job until I try it.



INSTEAD OF... (UNBALANCED THOUGHTS)	I COULD TRY... (BALANCED THOUGHTS)
I'm never going to get the marks I need to get into the program I want. I'm going to fail.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will try my best and focus on the learning rather than the marks. By studying, staying organized, and taking care of myself I put myself in a position to do my best.
I should be better than I am.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We all grow at different times. Maybe I'm not where I want to be, but I get better every day and there will be lots of opportunities to continue to improve myself. I don't have to be perfect. No one is. I'm going to learn from my experiences instead of criticizing myself.
I should be able to handle the stress. Everyone else is.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many people are stressed. We just don't always talk about it, and social media doesn't help. I will try my best to handle the stress, but it's okay to ask for help if I need it. Many people ask for help and it can be part of having a successful year.
My parent(s)/ caregiver(s) expect me to have a certain career. I don't want to disappoint them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'll try my best, but I can't and I don't control everything. There are other ways I can make my parent(s)/caregivers(s) proud too, like through the person I am, not just what I study or what job I have.
My parent(s)/ caregiver(s) have sacrificed a lot for me. I owe it to them to get into this program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whatever path I take, I can still express gratitude to my parent(s)/ caregiver(s) for all they have done for me and be a caring member of our family.
My sibling/friend had much better grades and was more successful than I'll be.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My sibling/friend and I are different people and have had different experiences. It isn't fair for me to compare us. No one else is like me and my version of success could look different from my sibling/friend.
None of my friends are doing what I'm doing next year. I'm going to be all alone. Maybe we won't even stay friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'll have lots of opportunities to make friends after high school. I'll research some clubs, groups, and activities that I can get involved in. Things change, but I can make an effort to stay in contact with close friends from high school.
"Everyone else is going to do better than me."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm going to focus on myself. Comparing myself to others doesn't help me.

Tip: Try to catch yourself saying you "should" do things (I should do, act, feel better). "Should" often just makes us feel guilty and judge ourselves.





Appendix D

Sample – Letter to Your Next-Year Self

Dear next-year self,

I want to tell you how proud I am of you. You're trying so many new things, which isn't always easy for you. But you are doing it. I know not everything has turned out exactly as you had planned, and that's okay! You **can't** and you **don't** control everything. You're challenging yourself and doing something different. You're outside your comfort zone and that takes courage. Ups and downs are part of the process. Everyone has them, and you will, too. And you're never stuck! You're learning things you didn't know before and you might start to see things differently or become interested in something you hadn't thought of before. If you change direction and it's going to make you happier, that's a GOOD thing. No one has this all figured out, and you don't have to, either. Just take it one step at a time, focus on what's important to you, and stay connected to the people who matter most. Take care of yourself and take some time to do what makes you happy now and then, too. You deserve it. And I know you like to do things yourself, but it's okay to ask for help if you need it.

Remember, you are so much more than your marks or job, and you are valuable no matter what career you have. Be kind to yourself. It may not always be easy, but you are doing the best you can and that's enough.

Keep going. You can do this, too. I believe in you.

Yours truly,

Your last-year self





Appendix E

Quick Guided Meditation Script

I invite you to find a comfortable seated position and close your eyes or watch the video, if you wish. Take a slow, smooth breath in through your nose while counting 1, 2, 3, 4...and hold. Then exhale slowly through your mouth for 1, 2, 3, 4, and hold. Take another slow, smooth breath in through your nose for 1, 2, 3, 4, and hold...and out through your mouth for 1, 2, 3, 4...and hold. As you breathe in, raise your shoulders up towards your ears if you can for 1, 2, 3, 4, and hold. And as you breathe out, lower your shoulders for 1, 2, 3, 4, and hold. Raise your shoulders again, 1, 2, 3, 4. And lower them, 1, 2, 3, 4.

As you continue breathing, take a moment to focus on the connection between your body and the ground or chair beneath you. Feel it there supporting you, holding you up. Now think of all the other things in your life that support and hold you up—like the people, places, and things that make you feel connected, strong, cared for, and valued. That make you feel safe and protected. Imagine them through your senses.

Notice what they look like...

Notice what they sound like...

Notice what they feel like...

Choose one person, place, or thing that supports and holds you up and silently send out gratitude that it came into your life.

(Pause) As you continue to breathe, imagine yourself breathing out all the things that don't serve you. All the worries that aren't helpful to you. All the thoughts that get you stuck or cause you distress.

As you take a slow, smooth breath in through your nose and out through your mouth, replace those thoughts with more affirming ones. Think to yourself...

I cannot and I do not control everything.

I am valuable and I matter.

I am doing my best, and that is enough.

Continue to take slow, steady breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. As we draw this practice to a close, think of someone in your life who you supported or held up. Someone you encouraged. Someone you helped through a tough time. Think of the words they used. Now say the same words to yourself and treat yourself as well as you treat others in your life.

(Pause) Take one final breath in, and out.

When you feel ready, gently open your eyes and return to the present moment.





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 is an additional activity for you and your class.

Feeling good on social media

Where it fits: Action Task (How can we manage stress?)

- ▶ Invite students to review the following online article: [Seven Ways to Use Social Media to Benefit Your Mental Health](https://campusmentalhealth.ca/seven-ways-to-use-social-media-to-benefit-your-mental-health/) (campusmentalhealth.ca)
- ▶ Ask students to reflect on the following:
 - **How do you usually feel after you use social media? Does it contribute to your stress?**
 - **Does this depend on what kind of day you are having or what mood you are in? Are some moments better for you to use social media than others?**
 - **As you transition, how might you use social media in a way that is positive for you (e.g., to stay in touch with friends but not feel left out if you see activities that don't include you)?**

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)

