



Parent/Caregiver Handout

INTRODUCTION

We all want good mental health and well-being for our children (and ourselves!). We want them to thrive during times of stability and during times of stress. We want our children to know how to care for their own well-being and how to use effective coping and support strategies during challenging times. That's why school boards are introducing *MH LIT: Student Mental Health in Action* (Student MH LIT), a series of lessons about mental health and well-being for secondary school students. The lessons have been developed by School Mental Health Ontario with input from educators, students, and mental health professionals.

OVERVIEW OF LESSON

This lesson in the *Student MH LIT* series focuses on the transition from secondary school and the excitement and challenges that can come with it.

Did you know...

- ▶ Transitions—even good ones we are looking forward to—can cause stress. That's because they require us to learn new things, adapt, and grow.
- ▶ Exploring a new path after secondary school can definitely be exciting. However, it's important to acknowledge that it can be stressful, too, and those feelings are also valid.

Content covered in the lesson includes:

- ▶ Everyone experiences stress. It's the feeling we get when pressures and demands are put on us.
- ▶ We often want to avoid stress—like when we feel unable to handle situations, helpless, or worried about what is going to happen.
- ▶ Stress can be a positive thing—like when we feel we can deal with a situation and handling it makes us feel like we are capable, learning, and growing.
- ▶ There have been many changes related to the pandemic that have added to the amount of change we have been dealing with and the stress we've been managing.
- ▶ We can't always choose when we will experience stress, but we can choose how we get ready for it and how we respond when it appears. There are strategies that can help us manage and achieve our future goals.



- ▶ How we look at stress matters. Challenging and managing expectations related to the transition from secondary school can help reduce our stress.
- ▶ When we don't get a break from stress, it can affect our mental and physical health. When that starts to happen, it's time to connect with a trusted adult and seek support.
- ▶ Although the transition from secondary school is a change for everyone, everyone's experience will be unique. There are many pathways to success after graduation.

Tip: How you deal with your own stress is a guide for your teen as to how to deal with theirs. When you model constructive ways of managing stress, you are helping your teen learn them, too. Share what helps you and encourage your teen to try different strategies to find what works for them.

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT YOUR TEEN'S LEARNING IN THESE LESSONS?

Continue the conversation! Talking about mental health together is a great way to extend the learning. Ask your teen about the lesson. Here are some conversation starters to try:

- ▶ What did you learn?
- ▶ What are you looking forward to about the transition from secondary school? Is there anything you're worried about?
- ▶ What pressures do you feel around choosing a pathway? How can I help?
- ▶ What healthy habits could you start now that might help after secondary school? What helps you feel your best?
- ▶ Which healthy stress management strategies have you tried? Which strategies work for you? Are there any new ones you'd like to try?
- ▶ How could you tell if it's more than just the usual stress that can come with transition? How would you know it was time to talk to someone?
- ▶ Did anything from the lesson stand out for you or surprise you? Was there anything else you were hoping to learn?
- ▶ Has anything changed in how you think about change and transition?

The lesson is kept at a general level. However, sometimes talking about mental health can give rise to strong feelings. You may want to check in with your teen to see how they are feeling and to encourage them to participate in some wellness activities. Wellness activities are things we enjoy and that give us a sense of well-being (e.g., spending time outside, listening to music, talking to a friend, meditation, journaling, traditional cultural and/or faith practices, etc.).



WHAT DO TEENS WANT PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS TO KNOW?

Secondary school students who helped develop the lesson wanted to share the following with parents and caregivers:

- ▶ “Sometimes, just being present is incredibly helpful.”
- ▶ “Stress is different for everyone.”
- ▶ “Some students have different learning styles that can make school more stressful for them.”
- ▶ “Your secondary school experience and my secondary school experience are different. What worked for you may be different for me.”
- ▶ “If we have different ideas about my future, please listen and talk it through with me.”
- ▶ “All siblings/friends/family members are different. We have different personalities and pathways, and that doesn’t make one person more successful than another.”
- ▶ “If your child is struggling with their learning or mental health, looking for help for them is crucial.”
- ▶ “Knowing resources is extremely important.”
- ▶ “Transitions aren’t separations, they are a new path, the path we chose in life. We will always stay connected.”

RESOURCES FOR PARENT/CAREGIVER LEARNING

While students learn about mental health, you can, too! Here are some resources to support you:

- ▶ [CMHO Family Care Centre](#)
- ▶ [CMHA Ontario](#)
- ▶ [AboutKidsHealth Resource Hub](#)
- ▶ [Mental health and well-being](#)
- ▶ [School Mental Health Ontario](#)



SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

As part of every lesson, students will discuss how and where they can access supports, such as trusted adults (e.g., family members, coaches, cultural and faith leaders, Elders), community professionals and helplines. It can help to have resources available at home, too. Consider placing these on a fridge, cupboard, or another easily accessible family space.

Find help in your community through <https://cmho.org/findhelp>

- ▶ **Kids Help Phone** Call: 1-800-668-6868 Text: CONNECT to 686868
- ▶ **First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line** Call: 1-855-242-3310
- ▶ **Black Youth Helpline** Call: 416-285-9944 or toll-free 1-833-294-8650
- ▶ **LGBT YouthLine** Text: 647-694-4275
- ▶ **Trans Lifeline** Call: 877-330-6366

For more suggestions about how to support your teen, see the following School Mental Health Ontario resources for parents and caregivers:

- ▶ [How to Talk With Your Child When You Feel Concerned](#) (webpage)
- ▶ [Noticing Mental Health Concerns for Your Child](#) (info sheet)

For a variety of complex reasons and barriers, not all students may graduate when they expect and there are a variety of other personal goals some teens may feel they have not achieved. These teens may need support during this time of transition. If you feel your teen needs additional support, you can also connect with your school to help you determine the next steps.

SUPPORT FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Supports are also available for adults. If you feel you might benefit you can contact your family doctor or go to <https://www.ontario.ca/page/mental-health-services> to find local resources. You may also wish to visit [Wellness Together Canada](#). Parents/caregivers can also contact [Kids Help Phone](#) for support.

If you have questions about the lessons, please reach out to your teen's teacher or principal/vice-principal. Your school is there to help.

