



## Understanding school mental health supports to help your child

It takes a village to raise a child, and that village most definitely includes schools. Building trusting relationships and ongoing communication between parents/caregivers and schools helps with learning, as well as student mental health. Education systems are complex, however; and navigating them can be challenging.

This resource was developed to assist parents in supporting, navigating, and advocating for their child’s mental health at school.

**Note:** While we use the term “child” throughout, we recognize that the child in your care may be a teenager or young adult and that you may be caring for more than one child.

### How will my child’s school support their wellbeing and mental health?

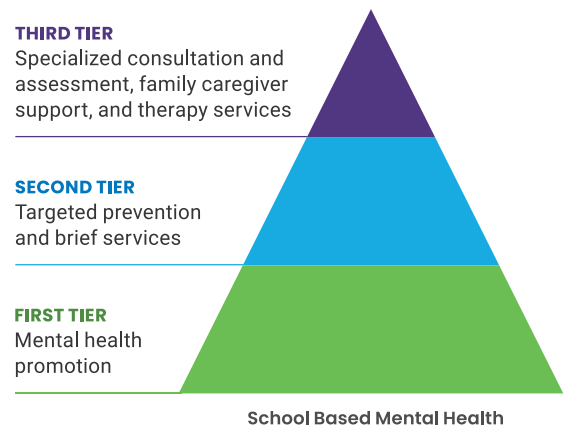
Did you know that school boards across the province use a three-tiered approach to provide access to mental health support for every student in Ontario?

**Tier 1 (designed to be good for all)** – The everyday work schools do to welcome and include each student, boost mental health knowledge, promote mentally healthy habits, and partner with families, students, and the school community to create a supportive environment.

**Tier 2 (necessary for some)** – For students needing additional support, educators and school staff reinforce skills and work to remove barriers to learning. Regulated school mental health professionals (social workers and psychologists) can provide school-based prevention and early intervention services.

**Tier 3 (essential for few)** – Smaller numbers of students require more intensive support. While this is sometimes provided at school, by school mental health professionals, it is often better for young people to access appropriate community or health services. School staff can help to coordinate a student’s ongoing care.

**If you are concerned about your child’s mental health, you can speak to their classroom teacher or a school staff member with whom you feel comfortable about school-based intervention and support services.**



# How is mental health learning delivered at school?

Learning about mental health—or “Mental Health Literacy”— is offered both directly and indirectly at school:

**Directly:** Throughout the year, many school staff teach students about mental health. Lessons focus on ways to promote good mental health, signs of mental health problems, how to support peers, and how to reach out for help when needed.

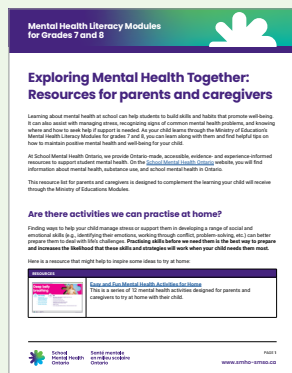
**Indirectly:** Mental health learning also happens indirectly through everyday mental health practices (e.g., wellness promotion strategies in the classroom, like deep breathing before a test, posters/reminders about how to find help for mental health problems). Helping a student understand their emotions or navigate conflict in response to real-time situations helps to put skills into practice.

The Ministry of Education offers mandatory lessons about mental health literacy in grades 7, 8 and 10. This information is available to you as parents/caregivers to continue the conversation at home.

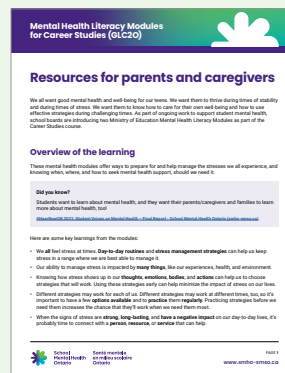


For more information on signs of mental health concerns and how to offer support to your child see [Noticing mental health concerns for your child](#)

## Exploring Mental Health Together: Resources for parents and caregivers



## Mental Health Literacy Modules for Career Studies (GLC20): Resources for parents and caregivers



# Should I reach out to the school if I notice changes in my child’s mental health?

If you’re concerned about your child’s mental health, speak to your child’s classroom teacher or another staff member with whom you feel comfortable.

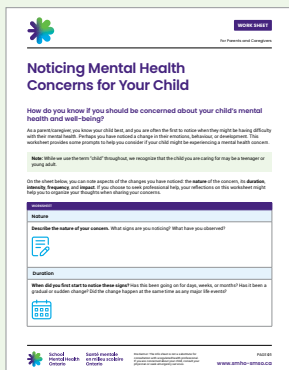
- Be specific about your concerns so you and the staff member can determine the best way to help. Share any information you think may be helpful to the staff member.

For example:

- situations your child has dealt with that may impact their mental health
- approaches that seem to help your child
- specific behaviours you’ve noticed



This tool may help you to organize thoughts and share concerns if you choose to seek support for your child. [Worksheet – Noticing Mental Health Concerns For Your Child](#)



- Ask the staff member what they've noticed at school. Some children may seem fine at school but display different behaviours at home. Discuss what you're seeing.
- You can also request a meeting with other school staff (e.g., School Principal / Vice Principal or Guidance Counsellor) to discuss how to support your child.
- Ask about ongoing communication options (e.g., phone calls, follow-up meetings etc.) to share new information with the school.

Educators aren't mental health professionals and can't diagnose mental health problems but they—along with support staff—play an important role in student support and are a vital part of the support team for students receiving treatment. Educators can help with referrals for professional mental health care and can provide ongoing classroom support.

## If I reach out to the school, will it be confidential?

School staff are expected to maintain confidentiality around personal matters, including mental health concerns.

Mental health services within school boards are fully confidential; this means that if your child is receiving mental health services at school, no other school staff members are aware of this or have access to any information without the expressed permission of your child and/or yourself as their parent/caregiver.

### There are some important exceptions to confidentiality:

**Duty to Report:** If a school staff believes a student is at risk of harm to themselves or others, they have a legal obligation to report it to Children's Aid Societies and/or relevant emergency services, depending on the nature of the concern. This includes situations where there is a concern about potential self-harm, harm to/from others, or abuse.

**School Policies:** to ensure the well-being of students, school boards may have specific policies regarding information sharing among staff members. For further clarity around confidentiality, speak to your child's principal.

Staff may need to share certain information with student support staff, school mental health professionals, principals, or other relevant personnel to provide appropriate support. You can ask the staff member directly who else they may need to inform or get involved.

## Who supports mental health at the school?

Schools are the most common places for students to access mental health supports and there are many people who can help. Some of those people include:

- **Teachers** assist with identifying and monitoring mental health problems and provide ongoing caring support in the classroom.
- **Educational Assistants** work with teachers to support the well-being of students receiving special education services.
- **Principals and Vice Principals** collaborate with parents and caregivers to provide further information and help coordinate supports.



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- **Guidance and Special Education Teachers** can offer additional caring support to meet a student's individual needs.
  - **Student support staff**, like Child and Youth Practitioners and Graduation Coaches, help with wellness promotion and may offer skill development in a small group setting.
  - **School mental health professionals**, like Social Workers and Psychologists, conduct formal assessments and provide brief, evidence-informed interventions at school.

Schools also can help you to link with community mental health professionals who provide more intensive therapeutic services, when needed.

## How can I advocate for my child and their mental health?

Advocating for your child means speaking up and ensuring their needs and wishes are heard.

This includes:

- Communicating with your child's teacher and school staff about your child's mental health- asking questions, raising concerns, and seeking assistance and support when necessary.
- Requesting and participating in meetings about your child's mental health, feeling comfortable speaking openly about your child, requesting a copy of notes, seeking clarification, bringing a translator, and encouraging your child to get help.

## If my child has a disability or is receiving special education services – how can I further advocate for their mental health?

Further to regular, ongoing communication with the teacher, if your child is identified through an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) Process or is supported with an Individual Education Plan, you'll have some additional connections to school staff. You can advocate by contacting school staff directly and using opportunities like team meetings or the IPRC process to express and share your concerns and ideas to best support your child at school.

## How can I support my child if they want to advocate for themselves?

You have an important role to play in working with your child's school to ensure your child's voice is centred in planning for their mental health and well-being. Older children and youth may want to express their needs independently:

- Encourage them to speak to an educator or caring adult in the school. Including them in the process helps build capacity, confidence, and skills for the future.
- Consider having them attend meetings to explain their experience and needs.
- Involve them in the decision-making process.

## Helpful Resources:

- [Mental Health Literacy Modules for Grades 7 and 8 – Exploring Mental Health Together: Resources for parents and caregivers](#)
- [Mental Health Literacy Modules for Career Studies \(GLC20\): Resources for parents and caregivers](#)
- [About School Mental Health Ontario](#)

