



# Reflection tool for mental health leadership teams

This resource is designed to be used alongside the [Info brief for mental health leadership teams](#), which outlines the core principles of social-emotional skill development in schools.

Thoughtful, intentional decision-making is essential when planning for identity-affirming social-emotional skill development (SESD) in schools. This includes both:

- the **system conditions** that shape how the work is introduced, supported and sustained
- the **resources and practices** used to explicitly teach social-emotional skills

## Implementation considerations

Effective implementation requires attention to the following foundations:

- system and school leadership commitment
- a clear, shared vision and strategy
- a team with clear roles and shared responsibility
- engagement and collaboration with key stakeholders
- shared language and coherence
- planning for professional learning processes
- data-informed monitoring and continuous improvement

Best practice also highlights the importance of **cascading implementation** – introducing approaches gradually so leaders are prepared, staff build confidence and learning can be adjusted based on feedback.

## Conditions for learning

Identity-affirming social-emotional skill development also depends on creating learning environments where students experience psychological, cultural and emotional safety. When students feel a sense of belonging, dignity and affirmation of their identities, this learning is more meaningful and effective. These conditions are not separate from the foundations, but a throughline that shapes how all implementation decisions are made.



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## Selecting resources

Materials used to support explicit social-emotional skill development should be:

- flexible and adaptable
- high-yield for all students
- easily differentiated
- culturally responsive and identity-affirming
- relevant to the Ontario context

This may require critically examining, adapting or phasing out existing programs. Some boards may find that current materials are outdated, overly rigid or not inclusive. In these cases, consider gradually introducing more flexible, affirming resources (e.g., [Everyday Mental Health/Faith and Wellness](#)) while moving away from highly manualized lessons.

As a first step, it can be helpful to reflect on the following:

- At our board, what is the shared vision for [identity-affirming](#) approaches to social-emotional skill development? How do we understand the purpose of social-emotional skill development at school? What are the priorities and goals?
- What does our senior leadership team understand about social-emotional learning and its strengths and cautions? Are they supportive of a process of review of current practice and capacity-building towards more modern and affirming social-emotional skill development that aligns with Ontario ministry expectations?
- What programming and practices do we currently have in place? What guided those choices? Are they achieving our vision and goals? Is there anything we would like to adjust, introduce, expand or remove (e.g., 'universal' or one-size-fits-all practices that may not work for all learners)?
- How are the programs and practices in place supported by broader identity-affirming approaches to social-emotional skill development and more flexible, differentiated ways of engaging students in this learning?
- What resources make sense to introduce now? Where will we start small and learn before scaling?

As you map out existing programming and practices, consider who can contribute to the conversation (e.g., the mental health leadership team, members of the curriculum department, educators, support staff) and sources of information you have to inform it (e.g., your Board MHA Scan over the past several years). This will be an iterative and ongoing planning process. Taking a long view is important. The following reflection tool is provided to assist you.



## Establishing system conditions for supporting social-emotional skill development

Effective resources to support social-emotional skill development require system readiness in several areas (e.g., leadership commitment, a clear vision and strategy for mental health in the board, anti-racist and anti-oppressive conditions for learning). Mentally healthy school environments are critical (e.g., establishing a climate for learning where students feel a sense of belonging and wellness, and that sets a welcoming, strength-based and inclusive tone).

Yes/no	Setting up <b>system conditions</b> for social-emotional skill development
	Clear and visible leadership commitment to student mental health and identity-affirming practice is evident at the board level.
	Anti-racist and anti-oppressive policies, training and practices are in place to support equitable implementation.
	Social-emotional skill development aligns with the Board Mental Health and Addictions Strategy and other key board priorities.
	Key advisory and governance bodies (e.g., Indigenous Education Advisory Council, SEAC, Parent Involvement Committee, trustees) have been meaningfully engaged in direction-setting.
	School leaders demonstrate understanding of and support for identity-affirming social-emotional skill development.
	Federations demonstrate understanding of and support for identity-affirming social-emotional skill development.
Yes/no	Setting up <b>school conditions</b> for social-emotional skill development
	The essential conditions are evident for mentally healthy, identity-affirming learning environments where students feel safe, valued and connected, and where belonging and wellness are intentionally supported.
	Families and community partners have been engaged in conversations about social-emotional skill development.
	Strengths and needs within the school community have been identified to inform planning and implementation of social-emotional skill development.
	Staff share a foundational understanding of identity-affirming social-emotional skill development.
	Staff readiness and buy-in have been intentionally built.
Yes/no	Coordinated and phased implementation planning of social-emotional skill development
	A clear plan exists to introduce and strengthen social-emotional skill development in a phased and coordinated way.
	Implementation considers the diverse strengths and needs of schools across the system.
	Roles and responsibilities are clearly identified across divisions, departments and staff groups.
	Appropriate staff groups (e.g., educators, student support staff, administrators) are meaningfully included in planning and implementation.
	Structures are in place to learn about and adjust and refine implementation over time.



## Selecting social-emotional skill development resources

Not all resources are evidence-informed, identity-affirming or relevant to the Ontario context. There are important considerations when selecting or approving resources for schools.

Yes/no	Alignment
	The resource aligns with the needs and priorities established through the Board Mental Health and Addictions Strategy and Action Plan and other relevant school/board strategies and initiatives (e.g., those related to equity and Indigenous education).
	The resource complements (and does not compete with) other board or ministry initiatives.
	The resource addresses a need or gap or builds on existing strengths.
	The resource will meaningfully add to or replace an existing resource.
Yes/no	Identity-affirming considerations
	The resource will meet the needs of every student or can be adapted to meet the needs of every student.
	The resource is culturally responsive and identity-affirming for students we serve.
	The explicit and implicit biases in the resource have been identified, and there is a plan to address them prior to delivery.
Yes/no	Evidence considerations
	The resource draws on established research, theory or widely accepted frameworks related to social-emotional skill development.
	The resource reflects practice-based evidence that There is practice-based evidence to supports its use in schools.
	The resource demonstrates coherence with existing evidence-informed practices used within the board.



## Implementing and supporting social-emotional skill development resources

Consider professional learning related to social-emotional skill development, the various audiences, what they already know, the areas of focus that should be prioritized and the various avenues for support. If possible, co-create the learning with the intended audience groups (e.g., school administrators, educators, student support staff). A strong focus on anti-racism and anti-oppression, implicit bias and [cultural humility](#) should be included in all training offerings.

Yes/no	Training and support requirements
	The level of training required for delivery of professional development on social-emotional skill development and this resource at school and the time/release time and costs have been considered.
	There is a plan in place so that everyone who requires training will be able to access it.
	The training includes a focus on anti-racist and anti-oppressive approaches and practices and a focus on implicit bias and cultural humility.
	The training considers adult social-emotional skill development and wellness and recognizes there is a strong connection between staff and student wellness.
Yes/no	Ongoing support
	The kinds of ongoing support most relevant and meaningful for those facilitating the resource and who is best positioned to offer it have been considered.
	Clear roles and points of contact are established for questions and implementation support.
	Opportunities exist for peer learning (e.g., communities of practice, network meetings, sharing promising practices).

## Sustaining social-emotional skill development resources

It is important from the early preparation stages to think ahead to what the resource would ideally look like to scale, and how you will assign budget and supports to maintain it long-term. Coherent and identity-affirming approaches to resource implementation are not static. Seek regular feedback regarding what is landing well for staff and students, and what is not.

Yes/no	Scalability and sustainability
	What is needed for this resource to be scaled to include every school, classroom and student who might benefit has been identified.
	We have a plan in place so that use of this resource will be maintained over time.
Yes/no	Monitoring and revisions
	The staff in the best position to report back on how things are going have been identified and there is a plan to monitor staff growth over time (e.g., self-reflections, coaching feedback, observation, PD evaluation).
	There is a plan in place to monitor how the resource is being implemented (not just whether it is) and to monitor progress.
	There is a plan in place so all stakeholders have a voice in the monitoring process.

