

Mental Health and the Ontario Curriculum

Continuing the Conversation

>> Mental health is considered a resource for living. Knowing about mental health and well-being helps us all to be healthy and helpful.

>> It also prepares you for the future. You might not be going through it now. You-- you-- you might have someone, a friend or yourself, go through it later on in life.

>> While talking about mental health in your school may not be new, experts say that student mental health is key to their learning, achievement, and well-being.

>> The important thing to remember with mental health is it's not a one off. It's not, okay, we're going to have our mental health day or our one mental health seminar or workshop, and this is what you need to know about mental health. It needs to be woven in continuously into the professional development of teachers.

>> The Ministry of Education has resources available to help build understanding of supporting student mental health and well-being. They're available online and in your school community.

>> I think it's really important for all people that work in our schools: our caretaker, secretaries, youth counselors, EAs, teachers, principals. I think it's really important because we spend so much time day to day with our students on-- in different levels, different roles and think the relationship that we form with them can have a really, really strong impact on their life.

>> I care. And that if that they need to talk, they know they can come and talk. And that-- that we'll do whatever it takes to support them.

>> Certainly demonstrate to the-- the rest of the staff what you'd like to see them doing as well. And you have to echo the student voice, once again, I think that's so important that you-- you let people know, parents included, to know that you're listening to the students, and you're not just listening but acting on what it is they want.

>> They ask for your opinion a lot of the time.

>> Well I like it when they ask, like, "Oh how come you're feeling this way?" And that-- I like that they're interested.

>> We make connections with a lot of the local partnerships in the communities. All of those supports are certainly there for the-- the staff to make connections with.

>> Parent and family engagement is critical in supporting student mental health.

>> We need to make sure that we're using similar strategies, that we have the open communication.

>> I think what's really important is that we learn to have conversations.

>> It all affects every aspect of life. It'll carry over into home life from school and everything. So I think it has to be a partnership.

>> Where my kids are now, they have big support in the classroom. Any concern I know they can go to their teachers and their teachers try to work it out with them or with us or with other people.

>> When planning instruction, it's important to consider the principal of first do no harm.

>> So at the first basis, the first tenant we want to keep in mind is to do no harm. And how do we do that when we're talking about mental health? Well, there's a lot of expert knowledge that occurs in the-- in the area mental health and we have experts in that-- that field. Social workers, psychologists, and what have you. We're not expecting our teachers to have that expert knowledge. So when they talk about mental health, generally speaking, to keep that proviso in the back of their mind. I'm not here to be an expert. I don't have to have all the answers on every single topic about mental health that might be impacting my students.

>> Educators are able to promote mental health and well-being for all students through every day instructional strategies and by establishing and maintaining a welcoming, safe classroom environment. Along with continuing an open dialogue with students.

Sean O'Toole teaches writers craft. He's asked for support when he's had concerns about students.

>> The line is basically, if I see-- If there's anything in there that-- that I mean, you know, it's my professional obligation. I have to forward it. And I will. And the kids know that right up front.

>> When in doubt, check it out.

Check it out with someone who might know a little bit more about it.

>> Experts say it is important to have established supports, context, and understanding before tackling situations that come up in the news or in the aftermath of a tragedy.

>> The research is showing us to-- that to speak about suicide in isolation, outside of a greater context of mental health and mental wellness can be detrimental. So in terms of doing

harm, you may inadvertently do harm by speaking about suicide in a public forum. Maybe glamorizing it inadvertently. It's best to be mindful and that's where consulting with people, the experts around you, would be very helpful in directing those well-meaning efforts in trying to help students but in a very helpful, supportive, and safe way.

>> It's the work that's going on every day in schools that will have a long term positive impact. Like the mental health professionals we've introduced you to, there are experts available through your school, school board, and community.

They're able to provide support not just in times of need but to help you extend your professional practice.

>> Keep your eyes open and your ears listening. And then become informed about just resources as they exist in your community. There are resources out there.

And encourage help seeking behaviour on the part of their youth but don't be afraid to walk along side that student and say how can I help you get the support and resources that you might need.

>> Teaching that tolerance and teaching that awareness that everyone is different and allowing students to problem solve on their own. I think a lot of times as adults we're too quick to jump in and try to solve problems for the kids. And so being there more as a structure to help them problem solve and being there to kind of point them in the right direction but by letting them solve their own problems and being able to do things on their own with us more as a coach. Kind of in the background rather than driving their-- their acts. I think that helps with that.

>> It becomes a part of the culture. It becomes a part of the daily activities. And so then the children are taught the skills that they need to function while they're in school and also beyond school as they move into either post-secondary, world of work, they're own families. It gives them skill set of what they need to-- to function.

>> To continue the conversation you can find links to evidence-based resources within the viewer's guide. You'll see information on initiatives such as school mental health assist and its resources for educators, school and system leaders. You'll also find a link to "Supporting Minds, An Educator's Guide to Promoting Student's Mental Health and Well-being." You can also talk to other educators, school leaders, and mental health professionals in your community.

>> We know that teachers care deeply about young people. We know that they want to do the very best they can, not just from a teaching perspective and from a learning perspective but from a whole child development perspective.

We've seen very, very positive results as a result of all of the things that are happening that are coming together. And, you know, it's not just one thing that's happening. It's about restorative practice, it's about character development, it's about equity and inclusion. And all of those things coming together around the same time I believe that the mental health awareness issues are coming together has really resulted in a positive school climate across our district. And I know across this province.

>> I like the way how you're nice to people and how you're a good friend.

>> Thank you. I like the way how you're--