

Mental Health and the Ontario Curriculum

Introduction

- >> Inhale through your nose.
- >> Take a second to breathe with the class.
- >> Three, four and slowly exhale, and see those bubbles floating away from you.
- >> Or another few seconds to conduct a cheque in.
- >> Say I'm feeling fantastic and my energy level's an eight, and I'm excited because it's really nice outside.
- >> So I'm tired because I was up late last night, and my energy level is a four.
- >> And take a moment to think about how during the hustle and bustle of the day you pause and reflect.
- >> You can get a book or read.
- >> Checking in with yourself and other's self-regulation and focussed breathing are some of the things that could have a lifelong impact on mental health and well being.
- >> We have students in front of us who are pretty significant part of their day, and to be able to take that opportunity to teach them some strategies to deal with challenging events or to build some self awareness into their feelings or how to read feelings of others, I think that's key.
- >> Because even though we're okay right now we never know later in life we might have the situations happen to us, so it's better to be educated or even to be educated to help others.
- >> So let's address it now while they're young and have them aware of it, and also that way you also create a more accepting community and remove some of the stigma.
- >> When some people think about mental health, they think about illness, but the Ontario approach uses the definition of mental health from the World Health Organization.
- >> It describes a state of well being, which basically encompasses all aspects of living, so physical emotional behaviour or social; it's more than just the absence of ill health or illness it talks about relationships. It talks about functioning well, functioning optimally, occupationally, as a student, as a relationship, interconnections. So it's a all-around sense of well being.
- >> So when we're talking about mental health with regard to students and learning and mental health what we really want to focus on is what's going well with them and how we can improve on those strengths and work with those rather than only focusing on what the problem is.
- >> Building healthy supportive and accepting school communities is a priority for the Ministry of Education. Student achievement is a fundamental goal, so too is well being.
- >> Mental health and mental wellness underpins all of student achievement. We can't achieve; we can't succeed unless we're mentally well. That's not just true for our young people; that's true for us as well. It's true for our community. It's true for our province.
- >> Mental health is not just a onetime course or lesson, but ideally it's integrated daily through the curriculum in explicit and implicit ways. It's supported in the classroom and school community through learning environments that are consciously set up to be caring and engaging.

>> I think the cross-curricular approach is beneficial for students in the long run. It allows them to kind of not view the mental health, mental illness as something specific that we just talk about, and then we've talked about it; I know about it; that's all there is, but that it is part of who we are. The same as when we talk about daily physical activity and the importance of being active; that has become part of just what we expect and so introducing mental health across the curriculum it shows that it's something that we need to be attentive to all the time. It's something that is normal.

>> Before we get too far in, we have to make it perfectly clear. Educators are not clinicians, which means no educator should diagnose a student.

>> Teachers are not trained to be mental health experts. We are trained to typically teach and we understand pedagogy and those kinds of things, but we often don't have a background or understanding in dealing with mental health issues. We have supports in place so that we have training, we have awareness of raising initiatives underway, and those kinds of things so that our teachers, our front-line workers, our education assistants and so on are able to recognize the symptoms, the signs, and more importantly help students get the help they need.

>> This is all part of "Open Minds Healthy Minds" Ontario's comprehensive mental health and addiction strategy. Identifying and intervening in child and youth mental health issues early is a goal of the strategy; this includes building educator capacity to be able to identify but not diagnose student mental health issues early and intervene effectively, and opportunity to support mental health is here within your classroom.

>> It'll also play itself out in families. It'll play itself out within the community, and you know as it's often been said it takes a village to raise a child, and so we need each other. We need the community partnerships that we can engage in as well to be able to bring that all to bear so that together we can, in fact, see healthy children.

>> There are many more explicit and implicit learning opportunities going on in classrooms throughout Ontario; to get the deepest information, review the "Viewer's Guide." You can also watch the videos, 'Elementary', 'Secondary', 'Supportive Learning Environment' along with 'Continuing the Conversation'.