

Mental Health and the Ontario Curriculum Supportive Learning Environment

>> How you doing?

>> Hey, how are you?

>> Good.

>> Hey guys, come in, that was good--

>> High fives in Grace Medeiros' class. It's a positive and friendly atmosphere where you know the learning environment is safe, inclusive and accepting.

>> How are you?

>> The same vibe is felt in Maria Winters' class.

>> I think it's all about the relationship, you know, between students and their teacher, and they need to feel safe. They need to feel that they're listened to and heard. They need to feel that they, somebody gets them, and I think if you have those things in place and you can create that kind of an environment in your classroom, then learning can happen.

>> If I trust a teacher then I'll like going to that class.

>> It's easier to teach someone if they have a connection with you, right?

>> In my own classroom now which is an open and engaged classroom, it's the way I think education has to be for me, because it's one of those things that I learn from the students just as much as they learn from me.

>> As educators your role isn't to provide direct mental health services, but you have an opportunity to promote mental health and well being by developing a supportive learning environment for all of our students in any grade in any subject area.

>> Teachers and educators and those that work within schools are really ideally positioned to support kids to acquire positive ways to cope with challenges to mental health, to create a safe and caring environment so that kids feel they're connected to their schools, as a place to go where they can learn but also get support when life gets a little bit tough, so really schools are well positioned to provide the kind of support that kids need that really enhance their learning.

>> You have an incredible ability to make a huge difference in the life of a student.

>> What happens at school through instructional practices, student groupings, and interactions, can have a significant influence on the well being of all of our students.

>> We love sharing it, I love hearing, I love knowing what's wrong if something is wrong, how I can help, how I can be there for you.

>> That is, that's awesome, so thank you for sharing that.

>> All students need a caring individual who's compassionate, who listens, who understands, who wants to learn, who wants to reach out to help, who wants to provide the resources necessary for kids, and I think that's cross cultural, because again it is all about the relationship between the teacher and the student.

>> They need to teach the students that they have in front of them. Take a look at the kids that they have in front, what are the needs the kids have there and how are they as educators going to meet those needs, because it truly comes back to what they're doing in their instruction, as well as how they're setting the stage to be able to do the instruction, because

we can teach a fabulous lesson, but if the kids in front of us aren't in the right mental frame of mind to be there, they're not going to get anything from it.

>> The quality of the interactions between an educator and a student matter.

>> And what we want to model to our kids is how we can be frustrated or how we can be sad or angry or whatever but still respond and interact appropriately.

>> So they're exposed to, you know, quite a bit of positive behaviour and role modelling so I think that really helps. They don't see us just as teacher, you know, we're also here as someone they can turn to and talk to if they need to and respect at the same time. It's not I'm at the front of the room, it's my classroom and this is the way it's going to be. We're more there I think as guides or facilitators and we've really moved in that direction and I think the kids, it rubs off on the kids, and it creates a more positive outlook. They see us--, it's more of a sharing environment than us telling them what to do.

>> And setting up conditions for positive interactions between students is important too, to help develop self esteem and respect for others.

>> There's no reason to be afraid to say anything. Make sure everyone's being respectful to that person and if there's no one laughing at you, there's no way to get it wrong.

>> Letting everyone know that they can talk if they want to, if they have something to share that they're allowed to, that no one's going to judge them for their opinions and they are allowed to have opinions, allowed to think.

>> Creating a healthy classroom environment that is engaging and caring means knowing your learner and helping them to know each other. One way is to do a cheque in circle.

>> The check in kind of just helps to ground us. It makes us present.

>> If on the average I'm using 10 minutes at the beginning and 5 minutes at the end to, you know, to get them situated and make them feel more comfortable and give them some skills, I think it's worth it. You know I get more time in the content because they're better, they're more relaxed, and the classroom feels--, you know everybody's talking to each other.

>> Well every class we're trying to really promote deliberate and meaningful conversations that help build confidence with students and provide them opportunities for success.

>> My math teacher he really likes to openly discuss things like we do here in health class. We always get the chance to ask questions and he always gives us the opportunity to answer as well. He never leaves somebody out.

>> How students work together, collaborate, and share knowledge, can be helped by the intentional consideration of student groupings.

>> If you let kids choose their group it's always the same, it's the friends, and sometimes they need to push themselves out of their comfort zone, work with different ideas, work with different kids, sometimes work with personalities that might be challenging, just learning how to adapt.

>> Consider the physical layout of a classroom, the position of desks, along with the potential to use the full school environment inside and out. What works here in kindergarden--

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[Children talking]

With quite corners and places to take breaks, works in secondary school too.

>> Lots of kids like to go and hangout in the cafeteria. We also have what we call our "chillaxin" area, that's an area of chairs where lots of kids go and hang out during their spare or they go there as a safe spot to--, and we know we can find them there. We also have kids that have safe places throughout the building that we know where they're going to be if they need to leave class and take a break.

>> Asking for and listening to student voice encourages the idea of school membership and supports a sense of truly belonging, including students as part of the decision making, helps them to build ownership in their learning and in their school community.

>> And when they co-construct there's a feeling of responsibility that comes with that as well where we planted these plants, we chose to have them here so we need to respect them in this area, and if this is a quiet area and I've chosen it then that's what I need to do when I go there. So it helps them regulate when they're in that area as well. It makes them responsible.

>> We're looking for that student voice to tell us what can we do that's going to make you feel safe and welcome and cared for by the adults in the building as well.

>> Planning can happen in the classroom and school wide to establish conditions that support students in making healthy choices.

>> They need to be very aware of how they eat, how they live, how they take care of themselves.

>> Creating healthy, resilient, and inclusive school communities is the goal. This student group works to promote mental health and well being and asks everyone to think about their own personal bias and perspective to help support learning, achievement, and well-being for all students.

>> It's kind of been the community together as well, like when we do a presentation it's about the kids, it's about the children that's going through it and like how to talk and how to explain yourself, how to try to like get a sense of help, that's what it means to me.

>> Physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally healthy students are more likely to reach their full potential.

>> By having healthy, inclusive environments at school you're building an awareness of mental health, you're building awareness that everyone's different, everyone brings a unique set of traits and characteristics who makes them who they are.

>> It's really about helping students to understand who they are and where they fit, not only within their communities and their families but within the school system, so creating that sense of belonging in the school system in a holistic way that addresses not only the mental part, the learning part, because that's the first priority of education is to help children learn, to develop their cognitive skills, but also to create a space for children that makes them feel emotionally safe, spiritually safe, and where they can be themselves.

>> To delve deeper see the video "Continuing the Conversation".