

# Mental Health and the Ontario Curriculum

## Video Viewer Guide - Educators

Laying the foundation for mental health early in life has been identified by experts as an important resource for living. Educators play an important role in supporting student learning about mental health and well-being by:

- » Teaching about mental health using explicit and implicit opportunities in the Ontario curriculum; and
- » Creating, fostering and sustaining a learning environment that is healthy, caring, safe, inclusive, and accepting.

There are five video segments;

- » Introduction (5:31 min.)
- » Mental Health and the Ontario Curriculum (Elementary) (6:44 min.)
- » Mental Health and the Ontario Curriculum (Secondary) (7:12 min.)
- » Supportive Learning Environment (8:14 min.), and
- » Continuing the Conversation (7:38 min.).

The segments are designed to stand alone or to be used together as a unit. As everyone plays an important role in supporting student mental health and well-being, the video segments highlight a range of perspectives including students, parents/guardians, educators, mental health experts and school/school board leaders.

The content in the elementary and secondary segments can apply to any grade within the respective panels, and also include valuable concepts that could be applied across panels. The videos provide an opportunity to build on our strengths, share knowledge and ideas, strategies and resources. You'll find discussion questions below to help guide your reflections as you view. The questions may also be useful to provoke discussion during conversations with colleagues and professional learning opportunities. There are also links to additional resources if you would like to delve deeper.

### Before Viewing

- » Reflect on what you consider the role of the educator is in supporting student mental health and well-being.
- » What does mental health mean to you? What does well-being mean to you?
- » Look for the explicit opportunities to teach about mental health and well-being, directly linked to the curriculum expectations.

Look for strategies educators are using where they have intentionally planned to help students learn about mental health and well-being while making curriculum connections that may not be directly linked to mental health.

### During Viewing

Consider the reflection questions for all segments.

- » What teaching strategies did you notice?
- » Reflecting on the needs of your own learners, what other teaching strategies could you use?

## Introduction: Mental Health and the Ontario Curriculum (5:31 min.)

This video segment provides an overview of what mental health is, and why it is important to student learning, achievement and well-being.

- » Reflect on the WHO definition of mental health as an overall of sense of well-being. What does this mean to you? What does this mean for your students?
- » Dr. Suzanne Stewart, Psychologist, talks about taking an approach that is focused on looking at student strengths. Why do you think this approach may be beneficial?
- » The narrator notes that checking in with yourself and others, focused breathing and self-regulation all contribute to mental health and well-being. Throughout this segment, we also see a number of images of students being physically active in a variety of ways. How does physical activity contribute to overall mental health and well-being? Think about what other factors also support mental health.
- » Dr. Elizabeth Paquette, Mental Health Leader, discusses talking about mental health as something that is “normal.” How can you support inclusive conversations to break stereotypes and lessen stigma about mental health? Consider having a conversation with students about what is “normal” and how “normal” may look different in different circumstances and for different people.
- » Dr. Paquette also distinguishes between “mental health” and “mental illness.” What does this mean to you?
- » Another Mental Health Leader, Patricia Marra-Stapleton, discusses students not being able to learn and achieve if they are not mentally healthy. Do you agree? Disagree? How does being mentally healthy contribute to student learning and well-being?
- » Do you work with any community partners to support student learning about mental health and well-being? How might these partnerships benefit your instructional strategies? If you don’t currently work with any partners, what might be a first step in finding out about resources in your community?
- » How would you explain about how students can learn about mental health and well-being through the curriculum to a colleague or parent/guardian who is new to your school?

## Mental Health and the Ontario Curriculum (Elementary) (6:44 min.)

In this video segment, you will see educators teaching and students learning about mental health across a range of elementary grades and settings. You will see examples of students learning where there are explicit links to mental health in the curriculum, such as students developing self-regulation skills in Full Day Kindergarten, and stress management skills in Health and Physical Education. You will also see how educators have intentionally planned for opportunities to learn about mental health using instructional strategies where there are less explicit curriculum links, such as exploring stereotypes and stigma through the Arts.

- » Kindergarten students talk about taking some quiet time when their “engines are revving too high,” and also about making their own choices. How do these skills set the groundwork for mental health?

## Mental Health and the Ontario Curriculum (Secondary) (7:12 min.)

In this video segment, you will see educators teaching, and students learning about mental health in various secondary grades, courses and settings. You will see examples of instruction where there are explicit opportunities to learn about mental health through the curriculum, such as in Health and Physical Education. You will also see other examples of how educators have intentionally planned instruction, incorporating opportunities for students to learn about mental health where there are less explicit curriculum links. Examples include exploring concepts related to mental health and well-being while studying a novel and writing in English, and creating artwork with mental health and well-being messages in Visual Arts.

*\*Please note in this segment, an educator references the Native Studies curriculum. This curriculum policy document, when revised and released will be titled, First Nation, Métis and Inuit Studies.*

- » The students in the Full Day Kindergarten class released a toad they had been observing. Think about how students can build empathy and caring skills, and learn about themselves from observing animals, insects and other creatures in the natural world.
  - » How do you help your students to know themselves and develop self-awareness and adaptive, management and coping skills (Living Skills in the elementary Health and Physical Education curriculum)?
  - » What strategies could you use to develop social-emotional learning in your classroom?
  - » A teacher, Maria Winters, talks about the importance of helping students learn problem solving strategies and coping skills. Consider how this learning can be applied across the curriculum.
  - » Transition years are sometimes a challenge for students. What supports are in place to help students?
  - » What strategies did you observe being used that showed opportunities for students to learn about mental health through the Ontario curriculum where a) learning about mental health is an explicit learning expectation and also where b) the educators have planned for students to learn about mental health together with other concepts they are learning.
  - » Near the end of the clip, we hear the beginning of a teacher sharing a personal anecdote about his experience being shy in grade 9. Sharing some information about yourself can help build a relationship with students, but educators also need to consider professional lines when sharing information with students. Consider your personal views about this idea.
- » Dr. Ian Brown, Psychologist from School Mental Health ASSIST talks about opportunities for students to learn about mental health across the curriculum. Consider the courses you currently teach and think about ways you could help students learn about mental health making connections to the curriculum.
  - » What strategies did you observe being used that showed opportunities for students to learn about mental health through the Ontario curriculum where a) learning about mental health is an explicit learning expectation and also where b) the educators have planned for students to learn about mental health together with other concepts they are learning.
  - » In the English class, Grace Medeiros was asking her students to look inside themselves. How do you help your students to understand their own thoughts and feelings at a deeper level?
  - » In the same English class, Grace talked about not being an expert. How might you utilize school/school board staff and/or community partners who are mental health experts to support instruction in the classroom?
  - » In the Health class, Karen Edwards is shown using an instructional strategy where she rips a piece of paper to show a range of things that have an impact on how she is currently feeling. Consider what strategies you use to provide students with opportunities to learn to identify and articulate thoughts and feelings related to mental health.
  - » A student, Jack, mentioned the importance of using words like depression correctly. Why is it important to help students understand mental health language?
  - » Eleanor Skead, Aboriginal Advisor, talks about the elements of well-being, including spiritual well-being. How does it benefit all students, including First Nation, Métis and Inuit students to consider this holistic perspective?

### **Supportive Learning Environment (8:14 min.)**

In this video segment, you will see elementary and secondary educators, students and mental health experts discussing the importance of planning for and maintaining a supportive learning environment for all students, and demonstrating how this can be done.

- » Thinking about your own classroom or the rooms where you teach. How do they look? How do they feel? Consider what makes it an inviting and welcoming space for all. Is there anything more that you could do? How have you or could you work with students to co-create this space?

- » What strategies did you observe the educators using to create safe, inclusive, caring learning environments?
- » Why is it important for us to create healthy, resilient and inclusive communities?
- » Emma, a student, commented, “It’s easier to teach someone if they have a connection with you.” Our students are so diverse, in more ways than we can see and hear when they come into our classrooms; how do you get to know them?
- » A Mental Health Leader, Lisa Doerksen talks about educators and those working in schools being ideally positioned to support students in acquiring positive ways to cope, learn and access support as needed. Consider how you currently do this and how you may be able to do additional things to make a difference.
- » Dr. Ian Brown talks about a caring adult being cross-cultural. How do you support students who are in a cultural and/or linguistic minority situation?
- » A principal, Andrea Grieve, comments about the importance of “teaching the students they have in front of them”. Consider strategies you use to intentionally plan to implement the curriculum with this in mind.
- » How can educators and parents/guardians work together to support mental health for all students?

### Continuing the Conversation (7:38 min.)

In this video segment, the importance of ongoing mental health professional learning, and resources available within schools, school boards and communities to support educators to continue to build their awareness and understanding of student mental health are highlighted.

- » Why is it important for all educators to develop an awareness of mental health?
- » Everyone has a personal perspective, bias, or connection to mental health. What do you do to think about this before teaching in order to be sensitive and inclusive when talking about mental health?
- » Think about the role of mental health through the statement, “mental health is much more than the absence of mental illness.” Consider why it is beneficial to take a strengths-based approach that focuses on mental health for all, rather than focussing on mental illness. Consider the context when “mental illness” is referenced in this segment.
- » Patricia Marra-Stapleton, Mental Health Leader, discusses talking about suicide in a planned, supportive and safe way, and some concerns about talking about suicide in isolation or without a broader context. How might you utilize school/school board staff and/or community partners who are mental health experts to support discussions about suicide and other mental health topics which need to be handled with sensitivity in the classroom?
- » You can see students participating in a wide range of physical activities throughout this segment. Considering the importance of physical activity to overall health and well-being, why is it important for students to have opportunities to participate in a wide-range of physical activities at school?
- » In one of the shots in this segment, we see students doing some daily physical activity. Observe the different levels of participation. Different levels of participation may be indicators of ability, engagement or something else. Consider the importance of observing closely to watch for cues that might indicate the need for more support or follow up.
- » How do you encourage ongoing conversations about mental health beyond your classroom?
- » What resources are you aware of that can support your learning in terms of mental health awareness and literacy?

### After Viewing

- » Who do you know, in your school, school board, or community, who could be a resource for mental health?
- » Where could you find more resources?

## Definitions

### Mental Health:

A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity: World Health Organization.

Mental health can be understood to exist on a continuum, from mental health being a state of well-being, through to mental health problems or concerns, through to mental illness. Mental health problems or concerns are emotional, behavioural, or brain-related difficulties that interfere with development, relationships, attendance and achievement. Difficulties that are severe and persistent enough to cause significant symptoms, distress and impairment in one or more areas of daily life are termed mental health disorders/mental illness: School Mental Health ASSIST

### Addiction:

A physiological and psychological dependence on a substance or behaviour, such as alcohol or gambling: Health and Physical Education Interim Edition, Grades 1-8. (2010)

*Please note that while the video segments focus on mental health and well-being in relation to the curriculum, addictions may contribute to mental health problems or concerns, or mental illness.*

## Credits

The Ministry of Education wishes to thank and acknowledge the contribution of the following people who participated in the development of these videos and viewer guides:

The students, staff, parents, guardians and community partners from:

- » Beaver Brae Secondary School, Keewatin-Patricia District School Board
- » Bishop Marrocco/Thomas Merton Catholic Secondary School, Toronto Catholic District School Board
- » Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School, Trillium Lakelands District School Board
- » St. Gabriel School, Ottawa Catholic School Board
- » Senator Gibson Public School, District School Board of Niagara

Dr. Ian Brown, Psychologist, School Mental Health ASSIST

Dr. Suzanne Stewart, Psychologist and Assistant Professor of Indigenous Healing in Counseling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Special Advisor to the Dean on Aboriginal Education, and Chair of the Indigenous Education Network

## Resources

- » [School Mental Health Assist](#)
- » [Supporting Minds: An Educator's Guide to Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being](#)
- » [Open Minds, Healthy Minds Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health Strategy](#)

There are also French-language video resources and viewer guides that have been translated into English that set out how the Ministry of Education is supporting mental health and well-being in French-language schools and school boards. [LINK TO BE PROVIDED](#)