

# Exploring Mental Health Together

Join your child's learning

Students in grades 7 and 8 are participating in a series of mental health literacy modules based on the [Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum](#). These modules have been made mandatory so that every student has access to reliable and research-based information about mental health that is relevant for the adolescent years. Developing skills and habits that promote well-being and learning about common mental health problems and how to access support when needed, can help students to care for their mental health and may help to prevent future mental health problems.

## What will my child learn?

GRADE 7	WHAT WILL MY CHILD LEARN?
<b>Mental Health, Mental Illness, and the Relationship Between Them</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mental health is something we all have, and we all want good mental health for ourselves and those we care about. There are many factors that influence and support our mental health. It is common to experience minor problems with our mental health from time to time, and there are strategies and supports that can help us to get back on track.</li><li>• Mental illness refers to conditions diagnosed by a qualified professional. It impacts our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and overall well-being. It can get in the way of what we want and need to do and can influence our ability to enjoy life. With the support they need, people with mental illness can have good mental health.</li></ul>
<b>Understanding the Signs of a Mental Health Problem and How to Seek Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is no one right way to maintain good mental health, and it is important to find a range of strategies and supports that fit with our culture, beliefs, and strategies that work best for us.</li><li>• Noticing changes in our mental health can help us know when to use certain strategies.</li><li>• Getting help when we need it is also an important strategy to take care of our mental health.</li></ul>

GRADE 7	WHAT WILL MY CHILD LEARN?
<b>Mental Health, Substance Use, and the Relationship Between Them</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People may use substances for many different reasons. Just because some substances are legal to use, does not mean that they are safe.</li> <li>• When we are younger, some substances (e.g., cannabis) can have lasting negative effects on our brains because they are still developing.</li> <li>• Our mental health can play a role in substance use. We can seek support for substance use problems just like we can seek support for mental health problems.</li> </ul>

GRADE 8	WHAT WILL MY CHILD LEARN?
<b>Mental Health and Stigma</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stigma related to mental health problems and mental illness can have negative impacts on all of us.</li> <li>• Our word choices can contribute to stigma and even cause harm, or they can be used to empower others, and support seeking help.</li> <li>• When we remove stigma, people are more likely to ask for help needed, which can prevent more serious problems from occurring in the future.</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Our Mental Health – Managing Stress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We all feel stress at times. Some stress can be a good thing! It can help us in many ways like preparing for a test or practicing before a game.</li> <li>• Managing stress is a skill we can practice and get better at. There are strategies that can help. It's important to have a few options available and to practice them regularly.</li> <li>• When we don't get a break from stress, it can impact our mental and physical health. If that starts to happen, it's time to seek more support from our family or other trusted adults.</li> </ul>
<b>How To Help a Friend – Seeking Support for Others While Caring for Ourselves</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have an important role to play in supporting our friends. Sometimes we need other people to play a role, too. We don't have to manage our concern for a friend alone.</li> <li>• Even if our friend asks us not to, we need to seek support right away if there is a risk to their safety or anyone else's.</li> <li>• It's okay to prioritize our own mental health while we are helping a friend. Our mental health matters, too.</li> </ul>

## How can I support this learning?

### Practice and model positive mental health strategies with your child

As your child learns through the mental health literacy modules, there is a great opportunity for promoting positive mental health at home. You can encourage your child to tell you about the ideas they are learning about at school, and you can practice a few strategies together (e.g., breathing strategies, stretching, enjoying time in nature, playing a game together, participating in a culture or faith-based activity, etc.). You may also wish to show your child how you use strategies to care for your own mental health. There are many ways to enhance a sense of positive mental health each day and practicing together can help to develop mentally healthy habits for a lifetime.

### Continue the conversation at home

As your child learns in the classroom, consider the following conversation starters to continue the discussion at home and reinforce the learning:

- What did you find interesting or helpful about what you learned?
- What strategies did you learn to help take care of your mental health?
- Are there things I can do or not do to make it easier for you to talk about mental health?

### Keep learning

Surveys have shown that students want their parents/guardians to know about mental health so they can support them with their well-being, especially when they are experiencing problems with their mental health. Seek out reputable information sources to learn more about mental health.

### Did you know?

1. Students across the province have told us that they want to learn more about mental health and mental illness, and they want to learn about it at school.
2. All Ontario school boards support student mental health by having a Mental Health Leader and Superintendent with responsibility for mental health. You can find out more about each school board's mental health strategy on the board's website.
3. A sense of connection and belonging can help prevent substance use problems. Your child's school can help with opportunities to feel part of a group through teams and activities.
4. We all have mental health! Mental health is defined as a state of well-being that includes a range of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. It influences how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. It is part of our overall health and plays an important role in our ability to enjoy life.

5. Mental illness refers to conditions diagnosed by a qualified professional. It impacts our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and overall well-being. It can get in the way of what we want and need to do and can influence our ability to enjoy life. With the support they need, people with mental illness can have good mental health.
6. Sometimes we may think of happiness as the preferred emotion. But a whole range of feelings can be healthy and important in helping us understand what is happening in our lives.
7. Practicing strategies to manage stress can help us feel well and be ready when we need them. These strategies can help us become better prepared and increase the likelihood that they will work when we need them the most.

## Know the signs of mental health problems

The mental health literacy modules for grades 7 and 8 students are intended to help every student thrive. However, even with this learning and good supports at home and school, some students can still experience challenges with their mental health. For that reason, it is important that parents/guardians are aware of the signs of emerging or intensifying mental health problems so they can take action when needed. Early identification of problems and providing caring support can prevent difficulties from getting worse and can help to ensure young people have the support they need to thrive.

There are a range of signs that may indicate a young person is experiencing a mental health problem. You know your child best and you are in a good position to notice when there has been a change to their usual way of being. The following are a few examples of signs to watch for.

- more outbursts of anger or distress
- frequent irritability
- increased feelings of worry and panic
- refusing to attend school
- withdrawal from friends, family and activities they previously enjoyed
- more rebelliousness and conflicts
- using drugs and/or alcohol
- ongoing negative comments about themselves
- declining grades, low motivation to complete tasks
- changes in eating and sleeping habits
- frequent talk about death and dying

**If you learn that your child is having thoughts of suicide or harming others, seek immediate assistance through emergency supports.**

**If you notice some of these signs in your child, consider the intensity, frequency, and impact of the behaviours and emotions you have observed.**

- Are these behaviours and emotions out of character for my child?
- Are they having a negative impact on my child's ability to enjoy everyday life, their friends, or our family life?
- Are they getting in the way of my child's progress at school?
- Are these concerning behaviours happening more often?
- Are these behaviours or emotions more intense than usual?
- Are they lasting longer than expected, given the circumstances?

**Be aware that noticing something has changed does not necessarily mean your child has a mental health problem or illness. It's best to find out more information and bring forward your observations to people who can support you.**

## The supports around us

Create a personal plan of who you can reach out to, and become familiar with the resources available at your child's school if you notice they are experiencing a problem with their mental health. **Remember, you are not alone!** There are a number of supports, services, and people around to help you support your child.

SUPPORTS AT MY CHILD'S SCHOOL	SUPPORTS IN MY COMMUNITY	SAMPLE EMERGENCY SUPPORTS
<p><i>Classroom teacher, principal, special education resource teacher, guidance counsellor, child and youth worker, social worker, etc.</i></p> <p><b>Make your own list:</b></p>	<p><i>Aunties, Uncles, Elders, Grandparents, Guardian, Friendship Centers, Community Agencies, Church, Mosque, Community Centers, etc.</i></p> <p><b>Make your own list:</b></p>	<p><b>Black Youth Helpline</b> Call: 416-285-9944 or Toll-free 1-833-294-8650</p> <p><b>ConnexOntario Helpline</b> Toll-free: 1-866-531-2600</p> <p><b>Kids Help Phone</b> Toll-free: 1-800-668-6868</p> <p><b>Local Emergency Room</b> 9-1-1</p> <p><b>Make your own list:</b></p>

**THE PROCESS FOR ACCESSING SUPPORT AT MY CHILD'S SCHOOL IS:**

*Speak to your child's classroom teacher, administrator or a school staff person you relate to and share your concerns, explore what services are available to support your child and the steps to access support.*

**Make your own list:**

**You deserve the support you're seeking. Don't give up — there are people to support your child and who will let you know you are not alone.**

## Your mental health matters, too!

If you ever feel you need support for your own mental health, connect with your family doctor, or:

- [Connex Ontario](#) | Call at 1-866-531-2600 for mental health & addiction treatment services
- [Ontario 211](#) | Call or text 2-1-1 for help connecting to community and social services you need
- [Crisis Text Line](#) | Text HOME To 741741 for free, 24/7, nationwide service to people of all ages

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, go to the emergency room of your local hospital or call 911 (if you feel safe to do so) right away. If you choose to call 911, you may request that a mental health professional who understands your culture be sent, if there is someone available.